Critical Thinking Quranic Studies Textbook Series Book 28

Laleh Bakhtiar

Job, Samuel, David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Jonah, Ezekiel (Dhul Kifl, Ezra), Dhul Qarnayn, Luqman, Zechariah, John (Yahya), Jesus son of Mary, the Companions of the Cave and the Companions of the Town

Book 28

Quranic Stories of Other Prophets, Messengers and Ones Who Are Sent

Library of Islam

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PREFACE

EXPLANATION OF THE CRITICAL THINKING QURANIC STUDIES TEXTBOOK SERIES

There are thirty books in this series. Books entitled *Book Year 1* to *Book Year 24* consist of one book for each year of the revelation. Books 25-28 are devoted to the Quranic stories of all other Prophets and Messengers in order of their dates. *Book 25: Adam, Cain and Abel, Enoch (Idris), Noah, Hud and the People of Aad; Saleh and the People of Thamud; Book 26: Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob (Israel), Joseph and Job; Book 27: Moses, Aaron, Children of Jacob* (known as Israel), *Jethro (Shuayb), Joshua, Khidr and Samuel; Book 28: David, Solomon, Elijah (Ilyas), Elisha (Alyasa), Jonah (Younis), Ezekiel (Dhul Kifl), Ezra (Uzayr), Dhul Qarnayn (Cyrus the Great or Alexander the Great), Luqman, Zechariah, John the Baptist (Yahya), Mary and Jesus.* The last two are: *Book 29: The Life of Prophet Muhammad from Birth to the Revelation* and *Book 30: Teacher's Manual.* The last, *Book 30,* has been prepared for the teacher's Lesson Plans.

SOURCES

The sources for the history include the works of Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Hashim, Waqidi, Ibn Sad and commentaries by Ibn Abbas, Jalalayn, Tustari and Sayyid Qutb. The sources for the commentaries of Ibn Abbas, Jalalayn and Tustari have been used with the permission of the publisher, the Royal Institute of Ahl al-Bayt in Jordan. They are available on their website www.altafsir.com.

The inclusion of excerpted commentaries (tafsir) by Sayyid Qutb's In the Shade of the Quran (available online) in this Critical Thinking Quranic Studies Textbook Series is because Sayyid Qutb is considered by some extremist groups as their intellectual source. By including excerpts from his eighteen volume Quranic commentary, extremists cannot disclaim the importance of learning critical thinking as this series is to help young adults learn HOW to think using self-realization (tahqiq) and critical thinking (furqan) skills taught by the Quran. This in order to arm young adults with the ability to choose reason over any irrational extremist ideology that is presented to them.

TERMINOLOGY

All Quranic signs are translations from *The Sublime Quran.* For the Muslim, the Quran is the Word (Logos) of God. It is this Word of God that has inspired artists, artisans, poets, philosophers and writers, those who had been the exponents of Islamic culture and civilization for almost 1500 years. Yesterday and today's Muslim wants to know more about each Word that God chose for His revelation through the Quran. This realization, in turn, prompted the translation of The Sublime Quran, an attempt to give the sense of unity

within the revelation to a non-Arabic speaking reader.

There are several points to note about the terminology used in the translation of the Quranic text and the commentaries.

1. The blessed Prophet did not bring a new religion; he came to confirm what was right in the messages of the previous Prophets. Does this translation speak to the universality of the Quran? The Quran tells the Prophet, the mercy to all of humanity, to speak to people in their own language. Following his example, in addition to the translation being unbounded by time, in several sensitive cases, the word chosen to translate an Arabic word is also of a universal or inclusive rather than a particular or exclusive nature. This adds to the broadening of the perspective and scope of the Quran so that it becomes inclusive rather than exclusive to one particular group of people. In other words, in this way a larger audience can relate to its message.

2. The Quran refers to itself (the Quran) from the very beginning of the revelation (68:35).

3 Most English translations of the Quran refer to the "Children of Israel." The word "Israel" when used in the Quran refers to Jacob, the patriarch of the children who followed him such as Joseph. Therefore, it should be the "Children of Jacob" as it appears in these texts.

5. The word "*kufr*" and "*kafir*" have been translated here as "ingratitude" and "ungrateful" where the context allows. This is the first meaning of the word and many of us in our lifetime have met Muslims who are "ungrateful." It is the ungrateful Muslims who practice intolerance by declaring anyone who says: Peace be upon you (as-salam alaykum) as a non-believer (with what is called *takfir*). In those cases, it would not be suitable to call them "unbelievers" or "infidels," but it is clearly appropriate to refer to them as being "ungrateful" and this would include the early Quraysh, ungrateful for God's revelation and prophethood of Muhammad, who ridiculed the Prophet and fought against the Quranic message of love, forgiveness and peace.

6. Yet another example of the use of inclusive language in an attempt to speak to people in their own language, is the use of God instead of Allah. Many English speaking Muslims, as well as many of the English translations of the Quran to date, use Allah when speaking English instead of God. The intention on the part of the speaker is to maintain a sense of piety. They feel that using Allah in English moves them in that direction. Many even claim that the word Allah cannot be translated.

However well-intentioned a person may be, when speaking English, the use of the word Allah instead of God, first of all, does not follow the Quranic verse that tells the Prophet to speak to people in their own language. Subsequently, it does not follow the Sunnah of the Prophet who did speak to people in their own language.

In addition, it creates a divide between Muslims who use the word and the English speaking people of various faiths to whom they are speaking. In

effect, it creates the illusion that there is more than One God—Allah and God. The response of the English speaking person of another faith is to say: I do not understand your religion; you have a different God than I do and you call Him Allah.

It needs to be clearly explained to English speaking Muslims that, unlike what they may feel, they do not have a monopoly on the word Allah. Arabic speaking Christians and Arabic speaking Jews also refer to God as Allah. The Old Testament and New Testament, when translated into Arabic, use Allah for God.

English speaking Muslims, therefore, need to recall the message of the Quran that God is One (tawhid). In addition, the Prophet did not bring a new religion but confirmed what was correct in the messages of previous Prophets, namely, that God is One. Finally, they need to follow the example of the Prophet, as the Quran says he is the model or example to be followed, by speaking to people in their own language.

7. The Arabic language, much like old English, has the second person singular (masculine: anta (where the verb ends in ka). The English equivalent is the subject: "thou" or the object: "thee" or the possessive: "thy." As these are no longer in common usage in English, wherever the original Arabic uses one of these terms, the word "**you**" or "**your**" appear in bold font so that the reader knows the original was the second person singular. When the Quran is speaking directly to the Prophet, it uses the pronoun "thee" or "thou" so it is an important distinction to make.

Using you (second person plural) is done to help English speaking readers, recognizing that using the second person plural pronoun you (masculine: antum where the verb ends in masculine: kum) for God is to intimate that God is plural, the only sin in the Quran that is unforgivable. By putting the pronoun **you** in bold font indicates the true intention.

8. For the Arabic word "*ayah*," the English word used in these texts is "sign" rather than the Biblical term, "verse."

9. Several of the signs were abrogated over time. However the indication of a sign being abrogated was done after the complete revelation of the Quran. Whether or not a sign was later abrogated does not change the fact that the first Muslims who listened to the Quran, heard the signs that may have later been said to have been abrogated and that a hafez of the Quran recites all the signs as they appear in the original Arabic revealed to the Prophet. Whatever signs scholars later determined to be abrogated are still part of the Quran and, therefore, are not relevant to learning to be a Quranic critical thinker, learning HOW to think.

10. The first number that appears when the Quranic Chapters begin refers to the chapter number in the chronological order of the revelation so that Quranic Chapter 110 which was the last to be revealed is number 114 in the chronological order.

11. It is to be noted that whenever the name of Muhammad, Prophet Muham-

mad or the Prophet are used, one may say a silent prayer of blessings for him.

12. All the signs in the text are in chronological order.

Laleh Bakhtiar, PhD
Chicago 2017

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Job

Remember Our Servant Job

Chapter 38: The 38th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And remember Our servant Job*
when he cried out to his Lord:
Truly, Satan afflicted me with fatigue and punishment! (38:41)
*It is said: Stomp with **your** foot.*
This is a place of washing that is cool
and from which to drink. (38:42)
And We bestowed on him, his people,
and the like of them along with them as a mercy from Us,
a reminder for those imbued with intuition. (38:43)
And take in thy hand a bundle of rushes
*and strike with it and fail not **your** oath.*
Truly, We found him one who remains steadfast.
How excellent a servant.
Truly, he was penitent. (38:44)

Commentary°

The story of Job and his steadfastness in face of severe tests is well known, and often cited as an example of patience in adversity. The part that sounds correct in the story is that Job was God's good servant who always turned to Him in humility and submission. God tested him and he remained patient. It seems that the test he endured entailed the loss of his wealth, family and health. Nevertheless, he maintained his bond with God, trusting to Him, and was satisfied with what God had given him.

He had a few well-wishers who remained faithful to him, including his wife, Rahmah, but Satan tried to convince these that if God had loved Job, He would not have subjected him to such a-severe situation. When they told him this, it was harder for him than the test itself. His wife spoke to him repeating some such whispers, and Job was very upset. He swore that should God restore his health, he would beat her, specifying the number of times he would hit her, which is said to be one hundred.

At this point Job complained to God about the trouble Satan's schemes and whispers were causing him. (38:41) When he had proved his sincerity beyond any doubt, and when he had rejected all Satan's attempts to weaken him, complaining that these were hard for him, God bestowed His grace on him, ending his test, and restoring his health. He ordered him to hit the ground with his leg, and a cool spring would gush forth. He was to wash himself with its water

and drink from it. This was enough for him to recover his health. (38:42)

The Quranic statement (38:43) means that when his health was restored, he regained his family that had almost been lost to him. He also gave him more as additional favors. This serves as a reminder to those who have insight and understanding.

What is important in this story related in this chapter is that they show how God bestows favors and grace on His servants. Although He subjects them to tests they remain patient in adversity, bearing their hardship with assured resignation, knowing that whatever God decides is ultimately good.

God also bestowed His grace on Job and his wife with regard to the oath he had made about beating her. She had looked after him during his days of hardship and was also patient during their adversity. Therefore, God ordered Job to take in his hand a bunch of dried sticks, in the number he had stated in his oath, and hit her with the bunch once only. In this way, he would fulfill his oath: Take in your hand a bunch of grass and strike with it, and you will not then break your oath. (38: 44) Such care and blessings were in return for what God knew of Job's patience in adversity, his being a model of obedience, always turning to Him for support: We found him patient in adversity. How excellent a servant of Ours; he would always turn to Us. (38:44)

God Gave Recompense to Job

Chapter 6: The 55th Chapter Revealed

And We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob.
Each of them We guided. And Noah We guided before and among
his offspring are David and Solomon and Job and Joseph
and Moses and Aaron. And, thus, We gave recompense to the ones
who are doers of good. (6:84)

The Prayer of Job

Chapter 21: The 73rd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And Job, when he cried out to his Lord:*
*Truly, harm afflicted me and **You** are*
One Who is Most Merciful of the ones who are merciful. (21:83)
So We responded to him.
Then, We removed his harm.
And We gave him back his people
and the like of others with them as a mercy from Us
and as a reminder of ones who worship. (21:84)

Commentary°

[These signs] also provide us with the example of Job, the Prophet, being tested with hardship. (21:83-21:84) Job's story is one of the finest that centers on a test. Quranic texts mentioning Job only speak in general terms, giving few details. In this particular instance, the [signs] mention Job's supplication and God's response, because the overall atmosphere of the [signs] are one of grace bestowed from on high on His Prophets and the care He takes of them when He tests them. This applies in all test situations, including rejection by their peoples, as with Abraham, Lot and Noah; power and wealth as with David and Solomon; or hardship with Job.

Job's prayer, as mentioned here, does not go beyond describing his condition and emphasizing God's attributes. (21:83) He does not appeal for his condition to be changed, because he wants to remain patient in adversity. Nor does he suggest anything to his Lord. His is an attitude of perfect humility before Him. Thus, he is God's model servant: neither panicking in a situation of adversity nor expressing frustration at the hardship he endures. Indeed, his is considered a test of the highest severity. He is reluctant even to pray to God to lift his hardship. Therefore, he leaves the matter entirely to God, knowing that He knows his situation and does not need his prayer.

At the moment Job addressed his Lord with such confidence and humility, his prayer was answered and God's grace was bestowed on him in abundance. His test was over. (21:84) His personal affliction was removed, and his health was restored. This indicates complete recovery, leaving no trace of illness. The affliction that concerned his family was also lifted.

All this was as "an act of grace from Ourselves," because every blessing is an act of God's grace. It was also "a reminder to all who worship Us." It reminds them of God and the tests He may put us through, and of His grace that will not fail to follow the hardship. The test to which Job was put provides an example for all humanity, and his patient endurance sets a model for all to follow.

The reference to those "who worship Us" within the context of hard tests is especially significant. Such worshippers may be subjected to tests and hardship. To endure with patience is a requirement of faith and worship. The whole matter is very serious. Faith is a trust that is given only to those who are able to shoulder its responsibility and endure its hardship. It is not mere words, carelessly uttered by anyone.

Samuel

The Prophet and the Ark of the Covenant

Chapter 2: The 87th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *Have you not considered*
the Council of the Children of Jacob after Moses
when they said to a Prophet of theirs:
Raise up a king for us,
and we will fight in the way of God.
He said: Perhaps if fighting was prescribed for you,
you would not fight. They said:
Why should we not fight in the way of God
when we were driven out of our abodes with our children.
Then, when fighting was prescribed for them,
they turned away, but for a few of them.
And God is Knowing of the ones who are unjust. (2:246)
And their Prophet said to them:
Truly, God raised up for you Saul, a king.
They said: How would it be for him to have dominion over us
when we have better right to dominion than he,
as he is not given plenty of wealth?
He said: Truly, God favored him over you, and
increased him greatly in the knowledge and the physique.
And God gives His dominion to whom He wills.
And God is One Who is Extensive, Knowing. (2:247)
And their Prophet)Samuel) *said to them: Truly, a sign of his*
dominion is that there would approach you
the Ark of the Covenant.
In it is tranquility from your Lord,
and abiding wisdom of what the people of Moses left,
and the people of Aaron. And the angels will carry it.
Truly, in that is a sign for you
if you had been ones who believe. (2:248)

Commentary°

The way the Quran portrays this episode is highly inspiring and particularly significant for all Muslim generations, let alone the first Muslim community. The total sum of what had taken place on this occasion is that, despite all the weaknesses shown by the Children of Jacob, leading to one group's desertion after another, the steadfastness of even a small group of believers achieved very great results for the whole community. They were able to turn the tables on their enemies, shaking off their long humiliation by their enemies to

achieve victory and establish the kingdom of David and Solomon. That was the beginning of the Children of Jacob's golden age. All this was the result of the new impetus given to faith after it remained long forgotten, and the steadfastness of a small group facing the large army led by Goliath.

A number of significant facts are highlighted here. The first is that public enthusiasm can be dangerously deceptive. Therefore, those in the position of leadership must put it to the test before going into a decisive battle. A group of wise and respected elders of the Children of Jacob requested their Prophet to choose for them a king who could lead them in their struggle for God's cause. They wanted to fight those enemies who had ravaged their kingdom and looted their property, including what was left by their Prophets, Moses and Aaron, and their household.

Trying to gauge their determination, their Prophet suggested that, once a battle loomed large, they might not be up to the task. Here their enthusiasm reached its highest point, and they expressed their attitude, feeling that they had every reason to fight. Such an attitude remains a human weakness often encountered in communities whose strength of faith remains suspect.

Their Prophet had to explain that the king was chosen by God, which should have been enough reason for his people to accept him, because God is powerful and generous and would only choose what would be in their best interest. Moreover, Saul was endowed with knowledge and physical strength, providing him with a greater quality of leadership and ability. This should have been enough to convince them to accept Saul as king over them; but, it seems, nothing short of a miracle would persuade them. (2:248)

In the post-Moses era, the Children of Jacob, during the reign of Joshua, were driven out of Palestine and most of their sacred heritage was pillaged and looted. This included a casket that was said to contain many relics of Moses and Aaron. More significantly, it also contained a copy of the tablets given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. The reappearance of that casket, carried by angels, would be, their Prophet said, a sign from God and material proof of Saul's kingship. Once they saw it they would be reassured and, if they were true believers, would accept him as their leader.

The narration suggests that the miracle did take place and, completely reassured, the Children of Jacob went on to confront their enemy.

Despite the lack of narrative details, we can gather that Saul had organized his fighting force of willing men and had gone ahead to do battle, and that as soon as they were on their way, he put their loyalty to the test. (2:249)

This example shows that good intentions, by themselves, are not sufficient unless they are tested in practice. It also demonstrates the strength of a leader who is not swayed by the fall of most of his troops at the first hurdle, but who forges ahead with the rest of them. Saul's forces were to encounter more trials of loyalty and strength. (2:249)

Their numbers had dwindled, and they were aware that they were outnumbered by Goliath's forces. Certainly, they had the advantage of faith in their cause and trust in their leader, but the harsh reality of the situation told them they were the weaker side, and that their faith would be put to the test. Would that invisible force of faith triumph? How strong was their faith in God, and would they be able to harness that force in their favor and prevail?

At that decisive moment, a small group of true believers stood up to express their faith. To the believer's mind, that is the way it should be: believers are always numerically less than their enemies, because they need to sacrifice more and work harder to earn God's grace and pleasure. But they triumph because they draw their strength from God Almighty and their faith in Him. The believers are aware that their victory comes from God as a reward for their patience and perseverance.

The leadership qualities of Saul are now coming to light. He was leading an army of a vanquished nation who had experienced defeat many times in its history, and was about to meet a formidable enemy, and had therefore to test the will of his troops. He had to be sure of their ability to overcome their desires and endure hardship and deprivation. Above all, he had to test their loyalty and obedience, and their ability to shoulder responsibility. He put them to the test at the river, having established that they were getting very thirsty, to find out who would obey him and who would not.

He allowed them a single scoop with the hand to quench their thirst, but most of them drank their fill and were left behind because they had failed the test. It was better for the rest of the fighting force as weaklings would have been a liability on the battlefield. Military prowess is not determined by size or numbers, but is measured by the will and moral strength and faith of the troops.

David

Remember Our Servant David

Chapter 38: The 38th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Have patience with what they say,*
and remember Our servant David,
the possessor of potency.
Truly, he was penitent. (38:17)
Truly, We caused the mountains to be subservient
to glorify with him in the evening
and the rising of the sun. (38:18)
And the birds were ones who are assembled,
all penitent to Him. (38:19)
And We strengthened his dominion and gave him wisdom
and decisiveness in argument. (38:20)
Approached ***you*** *the tiding of the disputants*
when they climbed over the wall of a sanctuary? (38:21)
When they entered in on David, he was terrified of them.
They said: Fear not. Two disputants were insolent,
one of us against the other.
So give judgment duly between us and transgress not
and guide us to the right path. (38:22)
Truly, this is my brother. He has ninety-nine ewe,
while I have one ewe. And he said:
Place it in my charge and he triumphed
over me in argument. (38:23)
David said: Certainly, he did wrong to ***you***
in asking for ***your*** *ewe in addition to his ewes.*
And, truly, many partners in business are insolent,
one to another, but those who believed
and did as the ones in accord with morality, and they are few.
And David thought that We tried him
and he asked for forgiveness of his Lord
and fell down as one who bows down penitent. (38:24)
So We forgave him that. And, truly,
for him is nearness with Us and goodness of destination. (38:25)
O David! Truly, We made ***you*** *a viceregent on the earth*
so give judgment duly among humanity
and follow not your desire
for it will cause ***you*** *to go astray from the way of God.*
Truly, those who go astray from the way of God,
for them there is a severe punishment
because they forgot the Day of Reckoning. (38:26)

Commentary°

David is referred to here (38:17) as a strong person who turned to God. The chapter earlier mentioned (38:12-38:13) the peoples of Noah, the Aad, Thamud, Pharaoh, Lot's people and the community that lived in the wooded dale near Midian. All of these were tyrannical, and it was such tyranny that gave them the impression of power. David, on the other hand, was a man of strength, but he always turned to God, repenting of his sins, glorifying God and worshipping Him. He did so when he was truly powerful, with a kingdom to rule.

In Chapter 2, The Cow (see below), we have an account of David in his youth, when he was a soldier in Saul's army. At the time, which was long after Moses, the Children of Jacob asked one of their Prophets to assign one of them as king and they promised that they would fight for God's cause under his leadership. God appointed Saul as their king and he marshaled them to face Goliath's mighty army. It was David who killed Goliath. From that day, his standing was enhanced, such that, in turn, he became king. Yet having a throne did not lead him astray. He continued to turn to God in repentance, glorifying and worshipping Him.

Apart from prophethood and a kingdom, God also blessed David with an alert heart and a melodious voice, which he used to good effect as he sang his psalms and hymns. He would be so absorbed in his devotion that barriers between him and the universe would disappear and the mountains would echo his glorification, while birds gathered around him, all glorifying the Lord Creator. (38:18-38:19)

Thus, his kingdom was strong and well established. (38:20) He administered his government with wisdom and clear, decisive vision. The phrase 'decisiveness in judgment' means that his views were clear, not subject to hesitation. When this is coupled with wisdom, it makes for perfect government within the human world. However, this did not spare David from being subjected to tests and trials. Nevertheless, God continued to take care of him and guided his footsteps:

These verses (38:21-38:24) tell of a test to which David was subjected. David used to devote some of his time to conducting the affairs of his kingdom and to judge in people's disputes. The rest of his time he devoted to his worship, preferring seclusion when he sang his psalms. When he went into the sanctuary, no one was allowed in.

One day, David was surprised when he saw two people climbing over the wall into the sanctuary. He was alarmed. No good believer or trustworthy person would enter in this way. Therefore, they immediately tried to reassure him, saying that they were in dispute and

wanted him to judge between them in fairness, showing them the way to justice. One of them immediately started putting his case forward, saying that the other man, his brother, had 99 ewes while he only had one. Yet he insisted on taking charge of his single ewe, placing it with his 99.

As stated by one of the disputants, the case is one of gross injustice that cannot be condoned. Hence, David immediately started to give his judgment without speaking to the other man or asking him to give his side of the story. Instead, he told the first man that the other had been unfair in his demands, and that many people behave in this way, except those who are good believers and do righteous deeds. These, however, are few in number. . . .

At this point David realized that this was a test. (38:24) His good nature surfaced again, because he was a man always ready to accept what is right. God's response was to accept his repentance. (38:25)

The Quranic comments given after the story explain the nature of the test and specify the line God wants His servant to whom He assigned judgment between people to take. (38:26) .

DAVID WAS PENITENT

And We bestowed Solomon on David. How excellent a servant.
Truly, he was penitent. (38:30)
When they were presented before him in the evening
—steeds standing with one foot slightly raised— (38:31)
he said: Truly, I cherished and loved the good
instead of remembering my Lord
when the sun secluded itself behind the partition of the night. (38:32)
Return them to me.
Then, he took wiping over their legs and their necks. (38:33)
And, certainly, We tried Solomon.
We cast a lifeless body on his seat.
Again, he was penitent. (38:34)
He said: My Lord! Forgive me and bestow on me
a dominion such will not be fit and proper for another after me.
*Truly, **You** are The Giver.* (38:35)
So We caused the wind to be subservient to him.
It runs at his command, a gentle wind, wherever it lit. (38:36)
And We made subservient the satans
and every builder and diver (38:37)
and others, ones who are chained in bonds. (38:38)
*This is Our gift. Then, have **you** shown grace*
*or have **you** held back without reckoning?* (38:39)
Truly, for him is nearness with Us,
and goodness of destination. (38:40)

Commentary°

[These signs] are a reference to the road taken by all God's Messengers. It groups them together. Everyone of them took it: everyone suffered, was tested and remained patient in adversity; each at his own step in the lofty ladder of prophethood. The life of each one of them was a series of tests, each bearing much pain. Even when things were pleasant and comfortable, this represented a different form of test so as to ensure that they remained patient when life was easy in the same way as they were patient in adversity. Both situations require endurance. When we contemplate the lives of all God's messengers, as told to us in the Quran, we realize that patience was the most prominent element. In essence, their lives were a long series of trials and tests.

The lives of God's messengers were in fact an open book for all humanity to read, with every page speaking about trials, afflictions and patience. The records show how the human soul triumphs over pain and necessity. How it rises above all that to which the present world attaches value, and how it discards desires and temptations, so as to achieve full dedication to God, and in so doing passes the test He has set. It shows the meaning of choosing Him over everything else. (30:4-30:5, 30:8). Indeed they said much more. God directs the Prophet to bear their statements with patience, and tells him that in his mind and heart he should live with a different type of people: the select few, God's Messengers with whom he has a strong affinity and close relationship. Indeed, he used to refer to them as though they were his immediate relatives.

People may be speechless when they hear that the mountains, inanimate entities, should join David in his constant glorification of God as he chants his songs of praise. Not only that but the birds also flock to him, listen and join in with the chorus to his hymns. Their surprise results from the fact that it runs counter to everything they have been used to. They only know that human beings, birds and mountains belong to totally separate realms.

Yet, why should anyone be surprised? All these creatures, different as their races, shapes, forms and characteristics are, share in one fundamental fact: they turn to the Lord who created the whole universe with all its animate and inanimate objects. When man's relation with his Lord attains sublime purity, barriers between different elements are removed. The whole matter is simple: God gave His servant David this unique characteristic, and caused the mountains to join him in extolling His glory morning and evening, and gathered the birds around him to echo his praises. This was simply an additional gift by virtue of God's grace.

It seems that at this stage the two men disappeared. In fact, they were two angels who had come to test David, the prophet God had placed in a position of authority to judge between people in fairness, making sure who is right before passing judgment. They had put the case to him in a very sentimental way, one that invited immediate sympathy. However, a judge must not allow sentiment to take charge. He must not be hasty. Above all, he must not rely on the statement of one party, without allowing the other party to present his case and submit his evidence. Some aspects of the case, if not all of it, may then be seen in a different light. In other words, appearances can often be deceptive or incomplete.

It is then a case of David being given the position of vicegerent on earth, one whereby he is required to judge between people in all fairness. He is told not to follow vain desires, which means in the case of a prophet, not to be hasty in one's first reaction. For this can easily lead to going astray from God's path. Rather, he must make sure of all the facts before passing judgment. The concluding sentence in the verse gives a general rule that applies to all cases of going astray from God's path. It exposes the person concerned to severe punishment on the Day of Reckoning.

One aspect of the care God took of His servant David is that He drew his attention at the first hurdle, and put him back on the right track at the first rash move, warning him of the ultimate result, when he had not even made one step towards it. Such is God's favor that He bestows on His chosen servants. Since they are human, they may slip when they travel an uneven patch of the road, but God takes them by the hand putting them back on course and teaching them how to repent. Then He forgives them and bestows even greater favors on them.

David Given Knowledge

Chapter 27: The 48th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Certainly, We gave David and Solomon knowledge;*
and they said: All Praise belongs to God
Who gave us advantage over many of His servants,
ones who believe. (27:15)

To David We Gave the Psalms

Chapter 17: The 50th Chapter Revealed

And your Lord is greater in knowledge of whoever
are in the heavens and in and on the earth.
And, certainly, We gave advantage
to some of the Prophets over others.
And to David We gave Psalms. (17:55)

The Offspring of David Guided

Chapter 6: The 55th Chapter Revealed

And We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob.
Each of them We guided.
And Noah We guided before
and among his offspring are David and Solomon
and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron.
And, thus, We gave recompense
to the ones who are doers of good. (6:84)

David Given Grace

Chapter 34: The 57th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We gave David grace from Us.*
O mountains! Echo psalms of praise with him and the birds.
And We softened iron for him, (34:10)
saying that: Work on full coats of mail
and calculate the links.
And do as one in accord with morality.
Truly, I am Seeing of what you do. (34:11)

*****

They worked for him whatever of sanctuaries he wills
—images and basin-like cisterns like water-troughs
and cooking pots—ones firmly fixed.
People of David! Act with thankfulness.
But few of My servants are grateful. (34:13)

Commentary°

David was the type of servant described at the end of the first part of the [signs] (34:10-34:11). The chapter follows this reference by recounting some of his history, preambled by details of the grace God bestowed on him. (34:10) Reports suggest that David had an unusually beautiful voice, and he used to sing his Psalms, which are praises of God mentioned in the Jewish Scripture, but God knows which of them were truly David's.

This (34:10) is another aspect of the grace God bestowed on David. Within the context wherein it occurs, this seems to be a miracle going beyond what is familiar to us. The chapter is not speaking here of heating iron until it becomes soft and molding it into the required shape. Rather, it appears that the iron was softened in a different way from what normally occurs, yet God knows best. Although guiding man to the softening of iron by heating is in itself an aspect of God's grace, our assumption here rests on the fact that

the overall atmosphere is one of miracles and unfamiliar phenomena.

Reports suggest that prior to David's time, armor was plated, (34:11) each coat being made up of one plate or sheet, which was very heavy for soldiers making them stiff and rigid. God instructed David in how to make armor from fine links that could be easily molded so as to move in accordance with the body. David was also ordered to make these links narrow so that they could give complete protection against spears, preventing them from penetrating through. This is the reference in the verse to measuring the links with care. All this was taught to David through divine inspiration.

(34:11) This does not apply to their making coats of mail. Instead it is clear that they must be on their guard in all that they do because God sees all and rewards everyone in accordance with what they deserve. Nothing escapes Him.

All this grace was given to David. Solomon was also given the ability to perform extraordinary feats, as a manifestation of God's grace. (34:12-34:13).

We can say that God placed the wind at Solomon's command (34:12) making it travel forward to a specific place [which according to Chapter 21, The Prophets, is Palestine] for a month, and then making its return journey over a period of a month. Certain objectives were achieved by these two journeys. These were known to Solomon and he accomplished them by God's command. We prefer not to say any more on this point so as not to indulge in unsubstantiated legends.

The general context of [this sign 34:12] again suggests that this was also a miracle, like the softening of iron for David. This might have taken place in the form of a volcanic fountain pouring forth brass that had been molten underground. Likewise, God might have instructed Solomon on how to get brass to become fluid and mold it into different shapes. Regardless of how all this took place, it was nonetheless an act of God's abundant grace.

The [signs] conclude with an address to David's household. (34:13) All this was given you by God's grace, through David and Solomon. You must not take false pride in it, but instead give proper thanks. Good action is an important form of thanksgiving.

However, few of My servants are truly thankful. (34:13) This comment also serves as a directive. It tells us on the one hand that the grace and favors God bestows on His servants are so great that few of them are able to express due thanks for them, and on the other that people often neglect their thanksgiving duty. In fact, however much people try to express their gratitude, they cannot give due

thanks for what God bestows on them. What is their status, then, if they slacken and overlook this duty?

David and his family were full of gratitude to God for all His blessings and used such favors for good purpose. The people of Sheba, however, are to be contrasted with such role models. In Chapter 27, The Ants, we have a report of what took place between their queen and Solomon. Here, the story gives an account of what happened to them after Solomon, which suggests that the events included here date back to a period after the queen's exchanges with Solomon. What makes this more likely is that the story here speaks of Sheba's people becoming ungrateful for God's blessings, which were then withdrawn and the people scattered. Under the queen mentioned in Chapter 27, they enjoyed a plentiful period and were very powerful. The first report received by Solomon about them was from a hoopoe who told him: "I found there a woman ruling over them; and she has been given of all good things, and hers is a magnificent throne. I found her and her people prostrating themselves to the sun instead of God; and Satan has made their deeds seem goodly to them, thus turning them away from the path [of God!, so that they cannot find the right way." (27:23-27:24)

This was subsequently followed by the queen's submission to God, as she embraced the divine faith. The story here, then, is certainly of a subsequent period. It tells of what happened to them after they turned away from God and refused to thank Him for His favors.

The Quranic description shows that David (peace be upon him) attained such a sublime standard of devotion and transparency in his praises that barriers between him and other creatures disappeared. Thus the truth between them became interrelated as they all praise God. Hence the mountains and the birds echoed his praises of God. When all of them had direct links with God, whatever separates species and creatures was removed. They felt that their bond with God overcame all barriers between them. Hence, they echoed one another in praising God, attaining an extraordinary level of transparency that can only be attained through God's grace.

When David raised his voice singing God's praises and glorifying Him, the mountains and the birds echoed him. The universe returned their songs as these were presented to God, the One. This is a remarkably splendid point in time which cannot be appreciated except by one who so experiences it, and even then only momentarily.

David and Solomon

Chapter 21: The 73rd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And mention David and Solomon,*
when they give judgment about cultivation
when a herd of the sheep of his folk strayed.
And to their critical judgment
We had been ones who bear witness. (21:78)
So We caused Solomon to understand it.
And We gave each of them critical judgment and knowledge.
And We caused to become subservient to David,
the mountains and the birds to glorify God.
And We had been ones who do such things. (21:79)
We taught him the art of making garments of chain mail
for you to fortify you from your violence
Will you not then be ones who are thankful? (21:80)

Commentary°

The story of the field over which David and Solomon gave judgment is detailed in some reports as stating that two men came to David. One of them had a field, or a vineyard according to some reports, while the other had a flock of sheep. David ruled that the owner of the field should take the sheep in compensation for his wasted crops.

The sheep's owner then passed by Solomon and told him of David's judgment.

Solomon went to his father and said: Prophet of God, you should have judged differently.

David asked: How should I judge?

Solomon replied: Give the sheep to the field's owner to benefit by them and give the field to the sheep's owner to tend until it is returned to its original state. Then each man returns to the other his property. Thus, the field's owner will get his field and the sheep's owner his sheep.

David confirmed that that was the right judgment, and he ordered it to be carried out.

This is a higher level of justice, one which was given by God's inspiration.

Both David and Solomon were given wisdom and knowledge. (21:79) There was nothing wrong with David's judgment, but that of Solomon's went a step further because it was inspired.

The chapter moves on to show what was given specifically to each of these Prophets. (Verses 79-80)

Both David and Solomon judged according to their own discre-

tion, but God was observing their judgment. He inspired Solomon to give the verdict that was fairer. David's judgment aimed to compensate the field's owner for the damage done to him, which establishes justice. But Solomon's judgment added to justice a constructive dimension. Thus, justice became a motive to initiate constructive effort.

David was famous for his Psalms, which were hymns that he chanted in his melodious voice. They were echoed by his surroundings, including the mountains and birds. When a human being feels his bond with God alive in his heart, he feels that the entire universe responds to him. All impediments and barriers separating different kinds of creatures are thus removed, so that they join together in one great, universal entity. In such moments of clarity, man's soul is united with all about it. It is no longer distinct from its surroundings. Indeed it is one with all that is around it.

As we read these verses we can imagine David chanting his Psalms, oblivious to his own separate entity, letting his soul move freely in the universe, looking at God's animate and inanimate creation. He feels that they echo his chanting and in this way respond to him. The entire universe thus becomes an orchestra singing a marvelous tune of God's praise and glorification. The seven heavens extol His limitless glory, as does the earth, and all who dwell in them. Indeed every single thing extols His glory and praise, but you cannot understand their praises. (17:44) The one who understands such praises is a person who sheds all barriers and separations. He is one who turns to God.

There is nothing difficult for God (21:79) when He wills to have it done or put in place, regardless of whether it is familiar or not to mankind.

This (21:80) was how God taught him to make shields using interconnected rings. Shields were previously made of long plates. Small, interconnected rings can make a shield that is easier to use and more flexible. It seems that it was David who invented this, as God instructed him to do. God reminds people of His favor in teaching David this art so as to protect them in wartime. The verse ends with a question that encourages them to do the right thing: Will you, then, give thanks?

David Killed Goliath

Chapter 2: The 87th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *So they put them to flight*
with he permission of God.
And David killed Goliath.

And God gave him the dominion and wisdom,
and taught him of what He wills.
And if not for God driving humanity back
—some by some others—
the earth would have, certainly, gone to ruin,
except God is Possessor of Grace to the worlds. (2:251)

Commentary°

The [signs] confirm that, despite their material disadvantage, the small, devoted, faithful band of believers prevailed and overran their formidable enemy. (2:250-2:251)

Their prayers are deeply sincere and poignant. The Arabic words depict patience as an endless shower poured down upon the believers by God Almighty, filling their hearts with reassurance and tranquility and providing them with the power and energy to face their superior enemy. They plead for strength to stand firm and to triumph over their adversary. It was clearly a confrontation between truth and falsehood in which God's intervention was indispensable to ensure a decisive victory for His allies.

At the time of these events, (2:251) David was a young man and Goliath a powerful king and a fearful commander, but God wished to demonstrate to the Children of Jacob that they should not judge matters at face value, and should look deeper into the reality of things. Their side of the bargain was to keep their pact with God and prepare themselves for battle, leaving the rest to God who knows the essence of all things and how they come about. The outcome would be decided by God, in accordance with His will and wisdom. It was God's will that a youth such as David should slay a powerful giant-of-a-man such as Goliath as proof that physical power by itself is not the decisive factor. The other divine objective, not obvious at the time, was that David was destined to inherit the kingdom of Saul, and that David would be succeeded by his son, Solomon, who reigned over what became the golden era in the whole history of the Children of Jacob, a period of great religious revival which came after their return from the wilderness.

Ungrateful Cursed by the Tongue of David

Chapter 5: The 112th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *Those who were ungrateful were cursed*
among the Children of Jacob by the tongue of David
and that of Jesus son of Mary.
That was because they would rebel
and they had been exceeding the limits. (5:78)

Commentary°

When we remember that it was Jesus and David who cursed the Children of Jacob, we realize that theirs is a long history of ingratitude, disobedience and rejection of the truth. Prophets who were sent to guide and save them were the ones who eventually condemned them so that they might not be guided to the truth. God answered their prayers and destined the Israelites to a perpetual curse.

The unbelievers among the Children of Jacob were the ones who distorted their revealed Scriptures and refused to abide by the rulings of the divine code, as we are told in several Quranic chapters. They violated their covenant with God in which they pledged themselves to support and follow every Messenger He sent. (5:78)

Solomon

God's Blessings on Solomon

Chapter 38: The 38th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We tried Solomon.*
We cast a lifeless body on his seat.
Again, he was penitent. (38:34)

Solomon Inherits from David

Chapter 27: The 38th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Certainly We gave David and Solomon*
knowledge and they said:
All Praise belongs to God Who has given us advantage
over many of His believing servants.
And Solomon inherited from David and he said:
O humanity! We were taught the utterance of the birds
and everything was given to us.
Truly, this is clearly grace. (27:16)
And there was assembled before Solomon
his armies of jinn and humankind and birds
and they are marching in rank (27:17)
until when they approached the Valley of the Ants.
One ant said: O ants! Enter your dwellings
so that Solomon and his armies not crush you
while they are not aware. (27:18)
So Solomon smiled as one who laughs at its saying and he said:
My Lord! Arouse me that I give thanks for Thy divine blessing
with which Thou wert gracious to me
and ones who are my parents
and that I do as one in accord with morality.
May Thou be well-pleased and cause me to enter by Thy Mercy
among Thy servants, ones in accord with morality. (27:19)
And he reviewed the birds and said:
Why see I not the hoopoe bird?
Had it been among the ones who are absent? (27:20)
I will, certainly, punish him with a severe punishment
or deal a death blow to it
unless it brings me a clear authority! (27:21)

Commentary°

Solomon's story is full of movement and action, rich in feeling and scenery. Highlighting certain images and separating them with

suitable gaps are two more aspects of the unique method of the Quran. (27:15)

The sign gives us an account of some of the favors God granted Solomon, particularly his knowledge of the speech of birds and other creatures. This is in addition to what is mentioned in other chapters, such as his ability to judge in intricate disputes, and the fact that the winds were made subject to his command, by God's grace.

The story begins with the reference to knowledge: For sure, We granted knowledge to David and Solomon. (27:15) Before the sign concludes we are told of their thanksgiving to God for this favor. They stress the great value and benefit of knowledge, and declare their praise of God for it. Thus, the value of knowledge is enhanced, and it becomes clear that people with knowledge are favored highly.

We are not told here of the type or speciality of the knowledge given to these two prophets because the emphasis is on knowledge in its entirety. This gives us the further connotation that all knowledge is a gift from God, and that it behooves every person of knowledge to know the source of such knowledge. This makes all those endowed with knowledge turn to God, praising Him, and motivates them to use their knowledge in ways that please the great Giver. Thus, knowledge, which is an aspect of God's favor, does not turn people away from God. Any knowledge that does so is deviant, moving away from its source and missing its goal. Nor does it bring happiness to the one who possesses it. Instead, it brings only misery, fear, worry and destruction.

The story then progresses concentrating on Solomon only. (27:16) David was given kingship alongside prophethood and knowledge, but it is knowledge, rather than kingship, that is mentioned in this context because being a king is too trivial by comparison.

It is clear that the inheritance intended here is that of knowledge, because it is the main blessing which deserves mention. This is confirmed by Solomon's declaration to his people. (Verse 16) He highlights the fact that he has been taught the language of birds, and mentions other favors in a general way, but he attributes both to the same source, which is not David, his father. Indeed, none of this did he inherit from his father

Removing the Barriers of Nature: "O people! We have been taught the speech of birds, and have been given of all good things. (27:16) Thus Solomon announces to all people that these are aspects of God's favors granted to him. He seeks no special position as a result. Indeed, he describes such favors as they truly are: This is indeed a manifest favor [from God]. (27:16) It is a favor that makes its source known to all. No one can teach the language of birds to man

other than God, and no one can give anyone a measure of all good things except God.

Birds, animals and insects have their own means of communication, which are in fact their languages. God, the Creator of all these says: There is not an animal that walks on earth and no bird that flies on its wings but are communities like your own. (6:38)

They cannot form communities unless they have ties and bonds which they maintain, and some means of communication with which to understand each other. This is clearly observed in many species of bird, animal and insect. Biologists who are interested in certain species try hard to understand a little of their languages, but they can only rely on guesswork which does not approach any degree of certainty. What God granted to Solomon was something special, a miracle that goes beyond the laws of nature familiar to man. The knowledge he acquired was not through any attempt he had made to understand these species; it was a gift from God.

This is only one part of the miracle God granted to Solomon, His servant. The other part was that a number of the jinn and birds were placed under his command, serving him like human servants would. Moreover, the birds thus placed under him were given special faculties far greater than ordinary birds of the same species. This is clearly apparent in the story of the hoopoe who was able to understand the situation at the Queen of Sheba's court as clearly as a most intelligent and religious person. This is again a miraculous aspect.

It is a fact that the law God has set for His creation allows birds a measure of understanding that may vary, but this measure remains well below what man understands. That birds have their own form is merely part of the overall balance maintained in the universe. It is subject to the general law of creation.

Another fact is that a hoopoe living today is exactly the same as other hoopoes that have lived on earth for a very long time. Its genes are such that they make it, practically, a clone of the first hoopoe. Whatever adaptations the hoopoe has gone through does not enable it to move on to a higher species. This is clearly part of the system and balance God has set for His creation.

The two facts mentioned above cannot preclude the working of a miracle whenever God, the Creator of all species and laws governing them wants it. The miracle itself may be a part of the overall law of creation, which we do not know in full. If it is, then this part occurs at the time appointed for it, which is known only to God. As it occurs, it transcends the natural laws familiar to man, but it thus complements the divine laws of creation and balance. This explains how Solomon's hoopoe came into existence, and perhaps all the birds that

were placed under Solomon's command at that time.

(27:17) This is a big procession in which are marshaled all troops, jinn, human and bird. Naturally, humans are well known to us, but the jinn are creatures about whom we know nothing more than what God has said in the Quran. They were created from flames, and can see us while we cannot see them. (7:27) [The reference in this verse is to Iblis, or Satan, who belongs to the jinn.]

They are able to prompt people and tempt them to take evil and sinful actions. We do not know how this takes place. We also know that a group of them believed in God's Messenger. He did not meet or see them, but God informed him of what happened: Say: 'It has been revealed to me that a group of the jinn listened [to the Quran]', and said: 'We have listened to a wonderful discourse that guides to what is right, and so we have come to believe in it. We shall never associate any partners with our Lord. (72:1-72:2)

We also know that God made some of them serve Solomon, making for him whatever he wished of sanctuaries, statues, and large cauldrons for cooking. They also dived into the sea for him, and did his bidding. Some were in his procession side by side with humans and birds.

We say that God placed under Solomon's command only a section of the jinn, birds, and humans. Thus it is clear that not all people on earth were his subjects, because his kingdom stretched over an area that includes today's Palestine, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq, up to the Euphrates. Similarly, not all the jinn or birds were under his command; rather it was a section of each type.

In support of this view about the jinn we cite the fact that Iblis, or Satan, and his offspring belong to the jinn as the Quran states: (18:50) God also says about Iblis: Who whispers in the hearts of humanity, from among jinn and humanity (114:5-114:6)

Thus Iblis and his offspring who all belonged to the jinn continued to whisper in people's hearts tempting them to sin during Solomon's reign. Had they been placed under his command, they would not have been able to do so since he was a prophet advocating what is right. Therefore, it is clear that only a section of them were loyal to Solomon.

So, this great procession was ready before Solomon: and they were all lined in orderly ranks, so that there would be no chance of disorder. They are described as 'troops' in the verse to indicate the orderly nature of the procession.

At length, when they came to a valley of ants, one ant said: Go into your dwellings, ants, lest Solomon and his troops inadvertently crush you. He smiled joyously at her words, and said: My Lord! Di-

rect my whole being so that I will always be grateful for Your grace which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and that I may do righteous deeds which will please You; and include me, by Your grace, among Your righteous servants. (27:18-27:19)

So the procession moved forward in an orderly manner, until they reached a valley where ants were in plenty. In fact the sign describes the place as a valley of ants. At this point, an ant supervisor made an announcement to all other ants in the vicinity. It should be remembered that, like bees, ants live in complex social colonies in which different ants have different functions and duties that are organized according to an elaborate system that we might find too difficult to emulate, despite our superior intelligence. So, the supervisor ant announced in the manner of communication used by ants that they should hasten back to their dwellings, so that Solomon and his troops would not crush them unawares.

Solomon understood what she said and was pleased. His pleasure was two-fold: he smiled at her words like an adult smiles to a child who tries to evade him, fearing that the adult wants to punish him when he has no such intention. Plus he was gratified that God has given him this gift which opened up for him worlds that are normally closed to mankind. He was also joyful at the fact that ants should have such understanding, with the ability to give orders and carry them out.

When Solomon gathered what the ant said, he smiled joyously at her words.' Yet he soon realized what had just happened. He realized that it was all a great gift God had granted him, lifting the barriers that separate different types of creation. He therefore turned to God in acknowledgement of His favors. (27:19) It is a direct address to his Lord, one that expresses the feeling that He is so close to him. He wants his whole being: organs, feelings and thoughts; heart, mind and tongue; words, actions and directions; talents, abilities and energies to be brought together to offer thanks for all the favors bestowed on him and his parents. Solomon's prayer indicates how profound his appreciation of God's grace was. He felt that God's blessings overwhelmed his whole being as also his parents'. Hence, he wanted to give due thanks with his whole being. (27:19)

To do good deeds is also a blessing from God to which He directs those who are genuinely grateful for His gifts. Solomon, a truly grateful servant of God who prays for His help so that he would wholeheartedly express his gratitude, also prays to Him to guide him to do what will earn His pleasure.

Solomon knows that to be included among God's righteous servants is an aspect of God's mercy. When it is bestowed on a servant

of God, it guides him to do righteous deeds, and thus he is included in this best group of God's servants. We note that Solomon, a prophet at whose disposal God placed large sections of jinn, birds and people, does not take anything for granted. He fears lest his deeds or thanksgiving might not be up to the standard expected of him. This is a case of refined sensitivity that enhances Solomon's aspiration to gain God's pleasure and receive His mercy. It is expressed at the moment God's grace is brought into view, as when the ant's warning to other ants focuses attention on God's grace that made Solomon understand her speech.

We see here two miracles, not one. The first is Solomon listening to the ant and understanding her warning to her community. The second is the ant's awareness that the approaching people were Solomon and his troops. We know that the first pertains to what God taught Solomon, a man and a prophet. Comparatively speaking, this is more probable than the second miracle that is clear in the ant's words. An ant may recognize that the approaching procession consists of gigantic creatures who could easily crush tiny ones like ants if they step on them. Prompted by the survival instinct God has given them, ants may flee such a danger. But for an ant to recognize Solomon and his troops is miraculous indeed.

Solomon and the Queen of Sheba

Makkah: *But it was not long in coming.*
Then, it said: I comprehended
what ***you*** *have not comprehended of it.*
And I drew near ***you*** *from Sheba with certain tidings.* (27:22)
Truly, I found a woman controlling them.
And she was given everything
and for her is a sublime throne. (27:23)
I found her and her folk prostrating herself to the sun
—instead of God—and Satan
made to appear pleasing to them their actions
and barred them from the way
so they are not truly guided. (27:24)
So they prostrate themselves not to God
Who brings out that which is hidden in the heavens and the earth
and knows what you conceal and what you speak openly. (27:25)
God, there is no god but He,
the Lord of the Sublime Throne. (27:26)
Solomon said: We will look on if ***you*** *had been sincere*
or thou art of the ones who lie. (27:27)
Go thou with this letter of mine and cast it to them.

Again, turn away from them and look on what they return. (27:28)
She said: O Council!
Truly, a generous letter was cast down to me. (27:29)
Truly, it is from Solomon and, truly, it is in the Name of God,
The Merciful, The Compassionate. (27:30)
Rise not up against me, but approach me
as ones who submit to God. (27:31)
She said: O Council! Render me an opinion in my affair.
I had not been one who resolves unless you bear witness. (27:32)
They said: We are imbued with strength and vigorous might,
*but the command is for **you**.*
*So look on what **you** will command.* (27:33)
She said: Truly, when kings entered a town,
they made corruption in it
and made the most mighty of its people humiliated in spirit.
Thus, this is what they accomplish. (27:34)
But, truly, I am one who will send to them a present
and will be one who looks
with what returns the ones who are sent. (27:35)
So when they drew near Solomon,
he said: Are you furnishing me relief with wealth?
What God gave me is better than what He gave you.
Nay! It is you who should be glad with your present! (27:36)
Return thou to them and We, truly, will approach them with armies
against which they will not be capable
and we will drive them out from there as ones who are disgraced
and they, humble-spirited. (27:37)
He said: O Council! Which of you will bring me her throne
before they approach me as ones who submit to God? (27:38)
*A demon from among the jinn said: I will bring it to **you***
*before **you** will stand up from **your** station.*
And, truly, I am strong, trustworthy. (27:38)
Said he who has knowledge of the Book:
*I will bring it to **you** before thy glance goes back to **you**.*
And, then, when he saw that which is settled before him,
he said: This is from the grace of my Lord to try me
whether I give thanks or am ungrateful.
And whoever gave thanks, truly, he gives thanks for himself.
And whoever was ungrateful, then, truly,
my Lord is Rich, Generous. (27:39)
He said: Disguise her throne for her that we look on
whether she will be truly guided
or she will be of those who are not truly guided. (27:40)

So when she drew near, it was said: Is thy throne like this?
She said: It is as though it had been it.(27:41)
Solomon said: The knowledge was given us before her
and we had been ones who submit to the One God. (27:42)
She was barred from worshipping God
by what she had been worshipping other than God
for, truly, she had been of a folk, ones who are ungrateful. (27:43)
It was said to her: Enter the pavilion.
And when she saw it, she assumed it to be a pool
and she bared her legs.(27:44)

Commentary°

The story of the ants is a prelude to Solomon's story with the Queen of Sheba in which the hoopoe plays an important role. The story is told in six scenes with certain aspects deliberately left out, but which do not impair our understanding. Indeed, these gaps serve to enhance the artistic beauty of the story. Furthermore, some scenes carry a commentary, alerting us to their spiritual significance and enhancing the moral portrayed. These stylistic features combine in such a way as to ensure the perfect harmony of the verses.

Since the reference to Solomon began by mentioning the jinn, humans and birds, as well as highlighting the importance of knowledge, the story gives roles to all three aspects of creation, thus showing the value of knowledge. It is as if the opening verses deliberately identify the key actors in the story. This, then, is one of the Quran's finer artistic features in storytelling.

As told in the [sign], the story paints the personal and distinctive features of the main characters: Solomon, the queen, the hoopoe and the queen's courtiers. It portrays the different reactions from these characters in the various situations presented.

The first scene begins with the military parade, after the procession has passed the valley of the ants:

He inspected the birds. (27:20-27:21)

We see Solomon, a prophet and a king, marshalling his troops, and inspecting the birds only to discover the hoopoe's absence. We understand that this is a special hoopoe, with a specific position assigned to it in the procession. It was not just one of thousands or millions of hoopoes on the face of the earth. We note that Solomon was alert enough to miss a mere soldier in the great multitude composed of jinn, men and birds. His enquiry is of the type that befits a commander: it is flexible, looking at the different possibilities: Why is it that I do not see the hoopoe? Is he among the absentees? (27:20)

It soon becomes clear to all that the hoopoe is absent without

permission. The matter needed to be dealt with firmly so as to keep matters under control, particularly because its absence was no longer a secret. Hence, Solomon threatens the absent hoopoe: I will certainly punish him severely, or I will kill him. (27:21) But Solomon is not a tyrant; he is a prophet. He does not issue a final judgment on the hoopoe before listening to what it has to say in its defense. Therefore, we immediately see Solomon as a just ruler: Unless he brings me a clear warrant, to justify his absence.

The curtains are drawn here, or maybe the scene continues as the hoopoe arrives. He carries an important and surprising piece of news for Solomon, as also for us who are observing events as they unfold:

But the hoopoe did not take long in coming. He said: I have just learnt things that are unknown to you, and I come to you from Sheba with accurate information. I found there a woman ruling over them; and she has been given of all good things, and hers is a magnificent throne. I found her and her people prostrating themselves to the sun instead of God; and Satan has made their deeds seem goodly to them, thus turning them away from the path [of God], so that they cannot find the right way. That they should not prostrate themselves in worship of God who brings forth all that is hidden in the heavens and the earth, and knows what you conceal and what you reveal. God, other than whom there is no deity, the Lord of the [truly] magnificent Throne.' (27:22-27:26)

The hoopoe is fully aware of the king's firm and serious demeanor. Therefore, he begins his report with a surprise that overshadows the fault of his absence and ensures that the king will listen to him: 'I have just learnt things that are unknown to you." What king would not listen when one of his subjects tells him that he has learnt something that he could not know?

Now that the hoopoe has the king's attention, it proceeds to give the news he brought from Sheba, in Yemen. He mentions first that: I found there a woman ruling over them, and he further adds that she has been given of all good things, which tells that her kingdom was affluent, powerful and civilized. Furthermore, the queen's is a magnificent throne. (27:23) She sits on a magnificent couch that indicates the presence of skilled workers. The hoopoe adds that he found both the queen and her people prostrating themselves to the sun instead of God. (27: 24) He explains that these people had erred because Satan had deceived them, making their deeds seem fair to them. Thus, they are bereft of guidance, and as such they do not worship God Almighty who brings forth all that is hidden in the heavens and the earth. (27:25) What is hidden' refers to everything that is con-

cealed, including the rain from the sky and the plants of the earth. It also includes the secrets of the heavens and the earth. He also knows what you conceal and what you reveal. (27:25) This mirrors what is hidden in the heavens and earth as it refers to what is hidden within one's own soul.

Until this point the hoopoe remains in the position of someone who has broken the rules and is still awaiting the king's judgment. Hence, it concludes the news it brought with a reference to God Almighty, the Lord of all, and the Lord of the magnificent throne, to which no human throne can be compared. (27:26) This reference is meant as a reminder to the king so as to moderate his attitude as he remembers God's great power. It is, in short, a subtle appeal for compassion.

What we see here is a remarkable, intelligent hoopoe who has faith. He presents what he saw very skillfully, aware of its position, and relying on subtle expression. It understands that the woman is a queen and the people around her are her subjects, and it is fully aware that they prostrate themselves before the sun, instead of God. It also knows that such worship should be offered only to God who is the Lord of all the universe. This is not how hoopoes generally look at matters and understand them. Such understanding by a hoopoe is indeed miraculous.

Exchange with a Powerful Queen: Solomon does not judge the matter hastily. He is not too thrilled with the news brought by the hoopoe. He wants to be sure before taking any action. This is the appropriate course to follow by a fair prophet and a wise king:

Said [Solomon]: We shall see whether you have told the truth or you are a liar. Go with this my letter and deliver it to them; and then draw back from them, and see what answer they return. (27:27-27:28)

At this point the contents of the letter are not revealed. They are left until it is delivered when interest is at its highest.

The curtains are drawn here. When they are lifted again, we are in the presence of the Queen of Sheba, after the letter has been delivered to her. She is in consultation with her advisers:

[The Queen of Sheba] said: Know, my nobles, that a worthy letter has been delivered to me. It is from Solomon, and it reads, 'In the name of God, the Most Merciful, the Beneficent: Do not exalt yourselves against me, but come to me in submission [to God].'(27: 29-27:31)

As she tells them of the letter we gather that most probably she did not know how the letter was delivered or by whom. She uses the passive voice in her report of its delivery. Had she known that it was a hoopoe who delivered it, as some commentaries on the Quran sug-

gest, she would surely have reported this as a remarkable and extraordinary event. Nevertheless, she describes the letter as "worthy', either because of its shape, appearance, the seal it bears or because of its contents which she reports to her advisers. (27:30-27:31) She did not worship God, but the whole region knew about Solomon and his status. Besides, the language of the letter was clear, decisive and to the point.

What the letter stated was very clear, simple and powerful. It began with the name of God, the Most Merciful, and made a single demand: that the queen and her people must not take a hostile or belligerent attitude towards its sender; rather, they should go to him declaring their submission to God, in whose name he addressed them.

Having reported on the letter and its contents, the queen requested advice, declaring that she would not make a decision without their consultation and consent: Nobles, counsel me in this my affair; no decision on any matter do I take unless you are present. (27: 32) Thus she appears to be a very wise queen. It is clear at the outset that she was greatly impressed by the letter, yet she also appears serious and decisive. She imparted this to her advisers by describing the letter as 'worthy'. It is clear that she wants neither opposition nor belligerency. She does not say this openly; instead, she prepares the way for it by the line she takes. She then requests their advice.

As is customary with courtiers, they declared their readiness to do whatever was demanded of them, but they left the final decision to the queen. (27:33)

Now we see the woman, rather than the queen, expressing her feelings. A woman instinctively hates war and the destruction it brings in its wake. Therefore, she decides to seek peace and conciliation rather than resistance and conflict. (27:34-27:35)

The queen is fully aware that when kings occupy a city or a country, they wreak havoc, destroying everything, so as to break all resistance. In particular, they target its chiefs, seeking to humiliate them as they are the ones who put up resistance. This is clearly the habit of all domineering kings. She is also aware that a gift wins hearts and emphasizes friendship. It may also remove the threat of war. Hence, her approach was certainly worth a try. If Solomon accepted the gift, then he was after something that belonged to this world. She would then know that normal worldly means would be effective. If he refused the gift, then it was all a question of faith that he would pursue with diligence, accepting no compromise.

This scene is concluded at this point. When the curtains are lifted again we see the queen's emissaries delivering her gift to Solomon who takes them to task for thinking that they could buy his peace

with money, seeking to divert him from calling on them to believe in God. He announced his final ultimatum, in clear and powerful terms.

(27: 36-27:37) His answer derides money, scorning its use in a situation that involves advocacy of the faith, where it can be of no use. (Verse 36) He has given me things that are far superior to wealth; namely, knowledge, prophethood and the service of the jinn and birds. No material thing, rich as it may be, holds any attraction for me: "Yet you rejoice with your own gift." (27:36) Such worldly luxuries may please the likes of you who have no bond with God and who do not receive His gifts.

He follows this with a new ultimatum, saying to the queen's envoy. (27:37) Such forces have never been placed under any person's command. The queen and her powerful army are no match for them. (27:37)

The curtains are drawn, and the envoys are dismissed. The [sign] does not add a further word about them. It is as if the whole matter is settled and needs no further comment.

Waiting for the Queen: We now see Solomon fully aware that his answer will settle the matter with the queen, whom he realized had no wish for conflict. Indeed, he felt that she was likely to respond to his call. The [sign], however, does not mention how her envoys returned, what they said to her, and how she made up her mind. There is a gap here, but we learn from what comes afterwards that she planned to go to Solomon, and that he was aware of her intention. Hence, he discusses with his commanders how to bring him her throne that she had left well guarded in her palace:

(27:38-27:40) What was Solomon's objective behind bringing her throne before she arrived and declared her submission to God? Most probably he wanted to show her some aspect of the superior power placed at his command. This was likely to win her heart and influence her to believe in God.

A jinn from among the jinn offered to bring the throne to him before he had finished the session he was attending. It is reported that he sat from morning till noon to judge in disputes that were put to him. Apparently, Solomon felt that this was too long a time to wait. Therefore, a person 'who was deeply versed in the Book' offered to bring it in the twinkling of an eye. The sign does not mention the name of that person, nor does it say which was the book known to him. We understand, however, that he was a believer who had a strong bond with God, and had some divine secret that allowed him to use something of the great power that transcends barriers and distances. This is something that at times occurs to some people with

very strong faith. No explanation is offered for it, because it goes beyond what is familiar to people. This, then, is all that we can say without delving into the realm of legend and superstition.

Some commentators on the Quran add certain details. Some say that the book mentioned in the verse is the Torah; others say that the person knew God's greatest name; and others still have offered yet more suggestions. None of these, however, gives us any explanation that carries any degree of certainty. Yet the matter is much simpler than all such explanations. Countless are the secrets we know nothing about in the universe around us, and numerous also are the powers that we do not use ourselves. Indeed, within the human soul there are many secrets and powers that we cannot fathom. When God wants to inform any of His servants of one of these secrets or powers that person will accomplish something of a miraculous nature that goes beyond what is familiar. It is all accomplished by God's will and design. No one other than a true servant of God will be able to accomplish such feats.

God Guided Solomon's Offspring

Chapter 6: The 55th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob.*
Each of them We guided.
And Noah We guided before and among his offspring
are David and Solomon and Job and Joseph
and Moses and Aaron.
And, thus, We gave recompense
to the ones who are doers of good. (6:84)

The Destruction of Saba

Chapter 34: The 57th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And to Solomon We subjected the wind.*
The first part of the day was a month's journey
and the evening course was a month's journey.
We caused a spring of molten brass to flow for him.
And We gave him of the jinn who work in advance of him
with the permission of his Lord.
Whoever of them swerved from Our command
We caused him to experience the punishment of the blaze. (34:12)

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Then, when We decreed death for Solomon,
nothing pointed out his death to the jinn,
but a moving creature of the earth that consumes his scepter.
So when he fell down, it became clear to the jinn

that if they had been knowing the unseen,
they would not have lingered in expectation
in the despised punishment. (34:14)
There had, certainly, been for Sheba a sign in their dwelling place.
Two gardens on the right and on the left.
Eat of the provision of your Lord and give thanks to Him:
A good land and a forgiving Lord. (34:15)
But they turned aside, so We sent against them
the overwhelming flood,
and We substituted for their two gardens,
two gardens yielding a sour harvest, and tamarisks,
and something of lote-trees here and there. (34:16)
That is how We gave recompense to them
because they were ungrateful.
And we recompense, but the ungrateful. (34:17)
And We made between them and between the towns
which We blessed, that which are manifest towns
and We ordained journeying in them.
Journey through them as ones who are safe night and day. (34:18)
But they said: Our Lord! Cause a distance between our journeys
and they did wrong to themselves.
So We made them as tales and We tore them to pieces,
a total tearing to pieces.
Truly, in that are signs for every enduring grateful one. (34:19)
And, certainly, established as true about them
was the opinion of Iblis and they followed him,
but a group of people among the ones who believe. (34:20)
There had not been for him any authority over them,
but that We know who believe in the world to come
from who is in uncertainty of it.
And thy Lord is Guardian over everything. (34:21)

Commentary°

We move to the scene in the story which shows Solomon's death while the Jinn continue to work hard as he had bid them, unaware of the fact of his death, until a worm had gnawed at his staff sufficiently for him to fall down. (34:14)

It is reported that in the position he was in at the moment of his death, he was leaning over his stick and that he remained in that position while the jinn continued performing the task he assigned them. Then a worm that eats wood came upon his stick. This type of worm gnaws persistently at wood ruining roofs, doors and buildings foundations. In parts of Upper Egypt, some villages do not use a single

piece of wood in their homes for fear of woodworm. When the woodworm had gnawed at Solomon's staff, it could no longer support him, and he fell down. Only then did the jinn realize that he was dead. (34:14)

Such, then, are the jinn whom some people worship. We see them here subservient to one of God's servants. They are totally unable to fathom something which is hidden from them, yet is very close: how then can they gratify people's appeals to learn the secrets of what is beyond the reach of perception!

The story of Sheba is also told in 34:15-34:21 with the following commentary: The story opens with a description of the great blessings they enjoyed and the provisions they were granted, as well as the requirement that they should demonstrate their gratitude as they could: There was a sign for the people of Sheba in their dwelling place: two gardens, one to the right and one to the left: Eat of what your Lord has provided for you, and give thanks to Him: a land most goodly and a Lord Much- Forgiving. (34:15)

Sheba is the name of a community living in southern Yemen, in a fertile land some of which remains so today. They were highly civilized and were able to make good use of their water resources, as they were blessed with much rainfall, occupying territory close to the sea in the south and east. They were thus able to build a natural dam between two mountains, erecting a great wall down the valley, with controlled openings. In this way they were able to retain water in great quantities which they used as they needed. This great dam was known as the Marib Dam.

The gardens to the right and left symbolize the splendid fertility of their land which gave them beauty and affluence. Therefore, they were signs reminding them of God who gives every good thing. They were commanded to make full use of what was granted to them and to thank the Giver. (34:15) They were also reminded of the nature of their blessings: the productive land and the forgiveness of their sins. (34:15) When such priceless blessings are given in plenty, why were they unwilling to give thanks? (34:16)

When they failed to show their gratitude to God and use what God favored them with in a goodly and beneficial way, He took away their source of affluence and let loose raging, stone-carrying torrents which destroyed their dam and its water flooded the whole area. With the dam no longer functioning, the land dried up. Instead of beautiful gardens they now had only a desert in which only a few wild trees were to grow, bearing no good fruit. The verse says that their gardens were "replaced ...with others yielding bitter fruit, tamarisks, and a few lote trees." (34:16) This was the best that their land could sub-

sequently produce and even then it was only in small quantities.

(34:17) Until then they had remained in their villages and homes. God stinted their provisions and replaced their riches with austerity, but He had not yet scattered them over a wider area. They had easy contacts with the cities blessed by God: Makkah and Jerusalem. To the north of Sheba, Yemen was well inhabited and its land routes to other areas were safe and comfortable. (34:18) It is reported that a traveler would leave one township in the morning and arrive at the next before dark. This meant that journey times were short, making travel easy, safe and comfortable.

Yet Sheba's people paid no heed to the first warning. Nor did the change in their circumstances make them turn to God and appeal to Him to give back their comfortable lives. On the contrary, their prayer betrayed stupidity and ignorance: "But they said: 'Our Lord! Make our journeys longer." They wanted long distance travel, which is undertaken only infrequently. In so doing, they demonstrated nothing but arrogance: They sinned against their souls." Their prayer was answered, but only as such a prayer should be answered. (34:19) They became like refugees scattered throughout Arabia. They also became the subject of discussions in others' gatherings. In other words, they were no longer a recognized community, but a tale people told. (34:19) We note that patience and steadfastness are mentioned alongside thanksgiving in times of plenty. The history of Sheba gives signs on both counts.

This is one way of understanding the last two verses. However, they may also be understood in a different way. As these places had power and dominance, the people of Sheba became poor, living like desert dwellers, and having to travel time after time to find pasture and water. They could not withstand the test that this entailed. Therefore, they prayed to God, and in this case their supplication would be rendered as: 'Our Lord! Lengthen the time between our journeys,' or make them less frequent, as travel has become too tiring for us. They did not couple this prayer with turning to God with repentance and seeking His forgiveness, so that He would grant them what they prayed for. Since they behaved arrogantly when they had God's blessings, and did not persevere when they faced adversity, God punished them by scattering them and so they disappeared, featuring only in people's tales. This makes the comment at the end of these verses fitting for their lack of gratitude for God's favor and lack of patience in adversity. (Verse 19) I feel this understanding of the verses to be also acceptable. God, however, knows His own purpose best.

As the story concludes, mention is made to the overall divine

planning and the rules God operates in life generally. It tells us what lessons we should draw from this and what lies behind it. (34:20-34:21)

The people of Sheba went the way that leads to a miserable end: Iblis felt that he could lead them astray, and they let him do so. Thus, except for a group of believers, they all followed him. This is what normally happens in all communities. It is rare that a community is totally bereft of believers who will not give in to Satan and his machinations. They thus prove that the truth remains, even in the worst of conditions, available to everyone who seeks it and wants to hold to it. Iblis never had an overpowering authority over them from which they could not be free. He can only approach them in order that they be tested, and everyone who wishes to stick to the truth could do so, while everyone else will go astray. Thus, in life, a type of person emerges who 'truly believe in the life to come', and thus his beliefs keep him on the right path. This type are distinct from the other 'who are in doubt' about the life to come. It is the latter who succumb to Iblis' temptations, heedless of the Day of Judgment. God certainly knows what happens before it actually takes place. However, He makes His reward dependent upon the thing actually taking place.

When we look at the story of Sheba's people from a broader angle, we see that its moral can apply to all communities at all times. The story can then be seen as demonstrating what happens when communities follow divine guidance or stray away from it. It also shows the reasons that make people take the direction they do. "Your Lord watches over all things." (34:21) Nothing is lost or overlooked.

Thus the second passage of the [sign] concludes, speaking of the life to come, just as did the first passage. It also emphasizes the limitless nature of God's knowledge and His awareness of all things. Both subjects are given much emphasis in this [sign].

The Winds Subjected to Solomon

Chapter 21: The 73rd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And to Solomon, the wind tempest*
runs by His command
toward the earth which We blessed.
We had been ones who know everything. (21:81)
And among the satans were some who dived for him and did acts other than that. And We were ones who guard over them. (21:82)

Commentary°

The case of Solomon was even greater. (21:81- 21:82) The Quranic text here states that winds, in their stormy conditions, were made subservient to Solomon, moving at his bidding to the blessed

land, which was most probably Palestine, given it was earlier described as such in Abraham's story. The question asked here though is how all this was done.

It is safer to explain this statement about the wind by saying that it was directed, by God's will, to the blessed land in a cycle lasting one month each way. How? As we have said, we cannot ask such a question about the operation of God's will, which is free and unrestrained. It is God's will that creates the laws of nature and sets them in operation. What we know of the laws operating in the universe is very little. There is nothing to preclude that other laws, about which we know nothing, are in operation, but their effects may surface only when God wills. (21:81) Unlike human knowledge, God's knowledge is complete and perfect.

The same applies to making the jinn subservient to Solomon such that they dive into the depths of the sea, or deep into the earth, to bring him some of its hidden riches or to perform other works. The word jinn includes in its meaning everything that is concealed, hidden or unknown. Quranic texts mention a type of creature unknown to us, called the Jinn. It was from among these that God assigned some to Solomon to dive in the sea and do his bidding. Furthermore, God kept watch over them so that they did not escape or rebel. It is He who holds sway over all His creatures, putting them to whatever purpose He chooses in any way He likes.

God tested David and Solomon with what pleases people. David was tested in connection with the administration of justice, while Solomon's test involved nobly bred, swift-footed steeds, as is detailed in Chapter 38. So we will leave that for now. Both David and Solomon persevered, sought God's forgiveness and passed their tests. They remained grateful to God for His favors

Sorcery Falsely Attributed to Solomon

Chapter 2: The 87th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *And they followed what the satans recount*
during the dominion of Solomon.
And Solomon was not ungrateful,
except the satans were ungrateful.
They teach humanity sorcery,
and what was caused to descend
to the two angels at Babylon—
Harut and Marut. But neither of these two
teach anyone unless they say:
We are only a test, so be not ungrateful.
And they learn from these two that by it they separate

and divide between a man and his spouse.
And they were not ones who injured anyone with it,
but by the permission of God.
And they learn what hurts them and profits them not.
And, certainly, they knew that whoever bought it,
for him in the world to come was not any apportionment.
And miserable was that for which they sold themselves.
Would that they had been knowing! (2:102)

COMMENTARY°

Would that be the end of their transgression? Would they, having rejected the revelations sent down to Muhammad, hold fast to the revelations given to their forefathers and show faith and loyalty to its laws and teachings? Definitely not. They cast God's revelations behind their backs and went in search of myths and superstitions. (2:102-2:103)

They abandoned divine revelations which had come to confirm their Books and gave credence to myths and legends from the time of Solomon, which falsely asserted that he practiced sorcery and witchcraft and owed all his extraordinary powers to them.

The Quran refutes this allegation completely and talks of sorcery and deliberate rejection of the divine faith, in the same vein. Thus, the Quran treats sorcery as disbelief, and attributes it to devils. (2:102) It further refutes the allegation that the two angels of Babylon, Harut and Marut, were sorcerers. It confirms that witchcraft. (2:102) The Quran makes the truth about these two angels clear. They were testing people's faith, for a purpose that has not been identified. Again associating sorcery, black magic and witchcraft with disbelief in God, the Quran exonerates the two angels, confirming that they had explained the nature of their work to the people and given them fair warning. (2:102)

At this point, the Quran establishes another fundamental principle of faith: nothing happens in this world without God's authority. (2:102) Cause and effect are only valid by the will of God. When you put your hand in the fire it is burnt, but the burning itself only occurs with God's leave; for it is He who gave fire the property to incinerate and gave human skin susceptibility to burn. This means that God is also capable at any moment of cancelling this property and rendering fire completely harmless, as was the case with the Prophet Abraham, when his people threw him into a blazing fire and he came out of it unscathed. (21:69)

The same is true for such practices as sorcery and witchcraft: they can only work with God's will, as must all conventional physical

and metaphysical phenomena of cause and effect.

The [sign] states clearly that what people learnt of practices that could bring discord between man and wife could only bring them harm. (2:102) Since this thing that they learnt is described as disbelief in God, this is reason enough to make it pure evil that can bring no profit whatsoever. When anyone makes such a deal, he realizes that he is assigning away every good share he could have in the life to come. That makes their deal a massive loss indeed. (2:102-2:103)

This condemnation applies to those who took to practicing sorcery and witchcraft at Babylon, and to those Israelites who gave credence to tales about Solomon and his kingdom and abandoned God's authentic revelations.

As to the identity of the two angels referred to here, Harut and Marut, and their location in Babylon, the story was well known in Jewish religious literature. The Jews of Madinah did not question the Quranic account of their story. Quranic accounts of this type, however, are often brief and general, since the aim is not to give detailed chronological or historic information, but rather to draw lessons and highlight the morals behind the events.

Black magic, sorcery and witchcraft still hold deep fascination for many people today, while many others are taken in by the seemingly extraordinary powers of their practitioners.

It is true that some individuals are seen to possess special powers or abilities not explained by scientific evidence. Science has not been able to go farther than giving a description of some of these phenomena such as telepathy, the supposed communication of thoughts or ideas other than by the known senses; and hypnosis, artificially produced sleep or the sleep-like state in which the subject acts only on external suggestion.

While recognizing these powers and acknowledging their existence and effects, science has not been able to offer any satisfactory explanations as to what they are or how they come about.

Elijah (Khidr, Elias)

Elijah Lived in Accord with Morality

Chapter 6: The 55th Chapter Revealed

And Zechariah and Yahya and Jesus and Elias.
All were of the ones who were in accord with morality. (6:85)

God's Blessings on Elijah

Chapter 37: The 56th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Peace be on Elijah!* (37:130)

Commentary°

A similar glimpse of the story of Elijah, a prophet mentioned in the Old Testament, is given here. Elijah was a Messenger to people in Syria who worshipped a statue called Baal. The ruins of the city of Baalbek in Lebanon retain traces of such worship:

Elijah too was one of Our Messengers. He called on his people to believe in God's Oneness, denouncing their practice of worshipping Baal in preference to God, the best of creators. Thus, he followed the same line as Abraham when he denounced his people's idolatrous worship. The same stance was taken by every Messenger when they encountered idol worship. The wrongdoers' response was to accuse Elijah of lying and to reject his message. God confirms here that they too will be brought before Him for punishment, except for those of them who believed in the message of the truth. This snippet ends in the same way as other historical accounts in this chapter by emphasizing the honor God grants to His messengers: this by giving them the greeting and blessing of peace, outlining the reward of people who do good and the great value of faith. This is the only occasion that an account of Elijah is given in the Quran.

Elisha (al-Yasa)

Elisha Among the Good

Chapter 38: The 38th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And remember Ishmael, Elijah (Elisha). . . .*
And all are among the good. (38:48)

Jonah

Jonah's Example

Chapter 68: The 2nd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *If a divine blessing*
not followed him one after another,
from His Lord he would be cast forth
on the naked shore
while he was one who is condemned. (68:49)
But his Lord elected him and made him
among the ones in accord with morality. (68:50)

Commentary°

The gist of Jonah's experience is that God sent him to the people of a town said to be Nineveh, near Mosul in today's Iraq. When they were slow in responding to his call, he was terribly upset. He left them in anger, thinking that God would not leave him to bear all the opposition those people presented. God would be kind to him and send him to others who would be less stubborn. In his distress, he went towards the coast where he took a boat. When they were far out at sea, the boat became shaky and seemed about to sink. It thus became necessary to throw someone overboard so as to reduce the load. They drew lots to choose that person. Jonah was the one, and they threw him overboard. Subsequently, a great fish swallowed him. Finding himself in such terrible distress, in layers of darkness, inside the whale in the depths of the sea, Jonah appealed to God. (21:87) God bestowed His grace on him and the great fish threw him out, leaving him skinless on the shore. His skin had melted inside the great fish. God preserved his life by His will, which is unrestricted by any law that is familiar or unfamiliar to human beings.

Here, in this chapter, God says that had it not been for the grace He bestowed on him, Jonah would have been abandoned, disgraced by God because of his lack of patience. He had acted on his own initiative, without waiting for God's permission. He was though only spared by God's grace. God accepted Jonah's repentance just as he demonstrated what deserves acceptance. Hence, God chose him and made him one of His righteous servants.

God reminds the Prophet Muhammad of Jonah's experience in the whale so as to reassure him at a time he was facing stubborn rejection. This reminder comes after He has told him to leave the battle to Him, to conduct as He determines in the way He wishes. What the Prophet is required to do, is to remain patient in adversity and to

await Gods judgment as and when it comes.

The true hardship the advocates of the divine message face is that of remaining patient in adversity until God makes His judgment at the right time, as His wisdom dictates. Along the way they face many types of adversity such as accusations of lying, physical persecution, stubborn rejection, the apparent power of falsehood as it seems to be victorious, and the need to remain steadfast in the face of all this, reassured that God's promise will be fulfilled. They must not hesitate to travel along their charted way, no matter what hardship they have to face. This requires great effort, determination and patience, as well as support from God. As for the battle itself, God has determined its nature and willed to conduct it Himself. It is He who has decided to give the ungrateful time and to lead them step by step, for a purpose of His own. Thus did He promise His Messenger, and He fulfilled the promise in good time.

Jonah's People

Chapter 10: The 51st Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And had there been a town that believed*
and profited from its belief other than the folk of Jonah?
When they believed, We removed from them
the punishment of degradation in this present life
and gave them enjoyment for a while. (10:98)

Commentary°

Although the chapter is named after the Prophet Jonah, there is no more than a very brief reference to Jonah and his people as follows. (10:98) The case of Jonah's people is the only clear example of a community which saved themselves before being overwhelmed by God's punishment. They believed in God when there was still time for them to do so. Moreover, they provided the only instance among those receiving God's messages of an entire community accepting the faith after having first given a negative response. Hence, they were saved from the punishment their Prophet warned them against.

Jonah's Delivery from Distress

Chapter 37: The 56th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, truly, Jonah*
was of the ones who are sent (37:139)
when he fled, without his Lord's permission,
to the laden boat. (37:140)
He cast lots with them and he had been

of the ones who are refuted. (37:141)
Then, the great fish engulfed him
while he was one who is answerable. (37:142)
If he had not been of the ones who glorify, (37:143)
he would have lingered in expectation in its belly until the Day
they are raised up. (37:144)
Then, We cast him forth
on the naked shore while he was ill. (37:145)
We caused a vine of gourd to develop over him. (37:146)
We sent him to a community of a hundred thousand,
or they even exceed that. (37:147)
And they believed, so We gave them
enjoyment for a while. (37:148)

Commentary°

The Quran does not mention where Jonah's people lived, but it is understood that they were not far from the sea. Reports tell us that Jonah was frustrated by his people's continued denial of his message and the truth it made clear. He warned them against God's impending punishment, and then abandoned them in anger. His anger led him to the sea-shore, where he boarded a laden ship. When the ship was in the middle of the sea, it was hit by a raging storm. It was widely believed at that time that such a disaster signaled that among the passengers there must be someone who had incurred God's anger. For the ship to withstand the storm that person had to be thrown overboard. They, thus, drew lots and Jonah was the one who lost. Although they knew him to be a virtuous and God-fearing man, the drawing of his lot was confirmed. Therefore, they threw him into the sea, or he might have jumped himself. Nonetheless, he was swallowed by the whale, deserving of blame, because he had abandoned the assignment God had given him, leaving his people in anger before seeking God's permission. When he felt acute distress inside the whale's belly, he glorified God and prayed for His forgiveness, stating that he had wronged himself. He said in his prayer. (21:87) God answered his prayer, and the whale cast him out. (37:143-144) When he was cast out, he was both sick and naked.

Therefore God "caused a gourd tree to grow over him, its broad leaves covering him. It also protected him against flies, which are said not to come near this plant. This was part of the favor God bestowed on him. When he had recovered, God returned him to the people whom he had left in anger. In turn, they feared that his warnings would come true, and they believed, praying for God's forgiveness. God thus accepted them, sparing them the punishment He

inflicts on people who deny His message. (37:148) They numbered a hundred thousand or more, and all of them became believers.

The Trial of Jonah

Chapter 21: The 73rd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And Jonah, when he went as one who is enraged,*
and thought that We would never have power over him.
And, then, he cried out through the shadows that:
There is no god, but Thou! Glory be to Thee!
Truly, I had been of the ones who are unjust. (21:87)
So We responded to him. And We delivered him from the lament.
And, thus, We rescue the ones who believe. (21:88)

Commentary°

Jonah is here called Dhul Nun, which means 'man of the whale' because he was swallowed by the great fish and then thrown out. He was sent to a particular city, and he called on its people to believe in God, but they rejected both him and his message. By way of response to their stubbornness, he left in anger. He showed little inclination to persevere with them on account of their rejection. He thought that God would not restrict him to a particular place, given there were many cities and communities, and that he would thus be directed to go somewhere else.

There are in Jonah's story some significant points we need to reflect upon. First, Jonah did not initially show enough patience and willingness to endure the difficulties of delivering God's message. He quickly became fed up, abandoned his people and moved on, angry and frustrated. He felt his situation to be very tight. But God exposed him to a much tighter and harder distress as compared with the opposition of unbelievers. Had Jonah not turned to his Lord in repentance and admitted that he had wronged himself by leaving his position of duty, he would not have been relieved of his distress. It was God's care that saved him.

The advocates of a message must be ready to bear the burden involved in such advocacy, remain patient in the face of rejection and vicious opposition. When a person is certain of the truth of the message he advocates, he finds the opposition of people who accuse him of false inventions and deliberate lying difficult to handle. Yet to remain patient in the face of such adversity is only part of the duties of such advocacy. Those who are entrusted with delivering a message and advocate the truth must remain patient, face the difficulties and persevere with their advocacy. They must continue to

present their message to people and call on them to believe in it, time after time.

Such advocates cannot give in to despair. They cannot give up on people, believing that they will never respond to the truth, no matter how much opposition they face, and how often they are rejected and accused of falsehood. If their hundred attempts to touch people's hearts meet with failure, their next attempt may have a positive result. Indeed, such a result may come only after one thousand and one attempts. Hence, if they have already tried a thousand times and failed, they should try once more in the hope that, with God's grace, their next attempt will be more successful.

The way a message must follow in order to touch people's hearts is neither easy nor comfortable. Positive responses may not be forthcoming. A great heap of false beliefs, erring practices, customs, traditions and situations weigh heavily on people's hearts and minds. This heap must be removed, and hearts must be revived in every possible way. A touch on every sensitive receptor must be made to try to find the effective nerve. With determination and diligence the right touch will inevitably be made, and a complete transformation of the addressee is achieved. We are often surprised that a thousand attempts may be made with one particular person, but without success. Then a casual gesture, coming at the right time, touches the right cord, and the person concerned goes through a complete transformation without any difficulty.

It is easy for an advocate of the divine message to be angry when people turn away from him. To give up and quit is always easy. It may enable us to cool down. But of what service is that to the message itself? It is the message that is most important, not its advocate. If we are angry, we should remain patient. It is infinitely better for us not to lose heart and not to give up.

An advocate is merely a tool in God's hand, and God preserves His message better than us. We must discharge our duty however hard the opposition we may face. We then leave the matter to God, and He gives guidance to whomever He pleases. In the story of Jonah we thus have a good example to reflect upon. His return to his Lord and acknowledgement of his error provide a good lesson. Furthermore, in the grace God showed him, answering the prayer he addressed through the compounded darkness, gives us great hope. (21:88)

Ezekiel (Dhul Kifl, Ezra)

Remember Ezekiel

Chapter 38: The 38th Chapter Revealed

And remember Ishmael, Elisha,
and Ezekiel (Dhul Kifl, Ezra).
And all are among the good. (38:48)

Commentary°

God states that Ishmael, Elisha and Dhul-Kifl were truly good. He instructs His last Messenger to remember them and to contemplate their patience in adversity and the grace He bestowed on them. He too should remain patient in the face of denial and rejection. Steadfastness and patience is the proper course for all advocates of the divine message, particularly God's Messengers. God will not abandon such servants. Instead, He will reward them for their patience. What He has for them is certainly better than anything else. When compared with God's grace and care, the schemings and rejections of the ungrateful are of little significance.

Enoch (Idris) and Ezekiel (Dhul-Kifl): they all were men of constancy and patience. (38:85-38:86) Again with all three the quality of patience in adversity is highlighted. Ishmael showed his patience when he was required to submit himself for sacrifice, and he duly did so.

Ezekiel is unknown: we cannot determine when or where he lived. Perhaps he was one of the Prophets of the Children of Jacob, or among their most pious and God-conscious people. It is also said that before one of their Prophets died, he guaranteed that he would take care of the Children of Jacob, giving a warrant that he would spend the night in worship, fast during the day and not allow anger to take hold of him when he ruled in a dispute. He honored all his commitments. It is said that he was called Ezekiel because of this, since his name refers to such practices. But none of these details is supported by evidence. The Quranic text here is sufficient to credit him with being patient in adversity, a highly rewarding quality. (37:86)

Dhul Qarnayn

Dhul Qarnayn and Gog and Magog

Chapter 18: The 69th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And they will ask you about Dhul Qarnayn.*
Say: I will recount to you a remembrance of him. (18:83)
Truly, We established him firmly on the earth
and gave him a route to everything. (18:84)
So he pursued a route (18:85)
until when he reached the setting of the sun.
He found it beginning to set
in a spring of muddy water.
And he found near it a folk. We said:
O Alexander! Either thou wilt punish them
or thou wilt take them to thyself with goodness. (18:86)
He said: As for him who did wrong,
we will punish him.
Again, he will be returned to his Lord
Who will punish him
with a horrible punishment. (18:87)
But as for him who believed
and did as one in accord with morality,
he will have the fairer recompense.
And we will say to him of our command with ease. (18:88)
Again, he pursued a route (18:89)
until when he reached the rising place of the sun.
He found it coming up on a folk
for whom We make not any obstruction against it. (18:90)
Thus, We, surely, enclosed whatever was near him
through awareness. (18:91)
Again, he pursued a route (18:92)
until when he reached between two embankments.
He found behind them a folk
who would almost not understand any saying. (18:93)
They said: O Dhul Qarnayn! Truly, Gog and Magog are
ones who make corruption in and on the earth.
Will we assign to thee payment
if thou hast made an embankment
between us and between them? (18:94)
He said: What my Lord established firmly for me is better,
so assist me with strength. I will make a fortification
between you and between them. (18:95)

Give me ingots of iron,
until when he made level between the two cliffs.
He said: Blow, until when he made it a fire.
He said: Give me molten brass to pour out over it. (18:96)
So they were not able to scale it
nor were they able to dig through it. (18:97)
He said: This is a mercy from my Lord.
So when the promise of my Lord drew near,
He will made it powder.
And the promise of my Lord had been true. (18:98)
And that Day We will leave some of them
to surge like waves on others.
And the trumpet will be blown.
Then We will gather them together. (18:99)
We will present the depths of hell on that Day
in plain view to ones who are ungrateful, (18:100)
to those whose eyes had been screened from My Remembrance
and who had not been able to hear. (18:101)

Commentary°

Of the history of Dhul-Qarnayn, the Quran mentions three journeys, one to the west, one to the east and the third to a place described as an area 'between two mountains'. Let us now consider this Quranic account.

The story of Dhul-Qarnayn, as given in this chapter, begins with a brief introduction of the man himself. (18:84) God then has established his power on earth, giving him uncontested authority. He has also given him the means of government and victory, the facilities to build civilization, enjoy the blessings God has made available to humanity, and all that make human life on earth steady and prosperous.

So he followed a certain way. (18:85) Thus, he went along one way which was made easy for him, aiming westwards. (18:86-18:88) Reaching the setting of the sun means the place where a person feels that the sun sets beyond the horizon. This varies according to geographic location. In some places we may feel that the sun sets beyond a mountain, while in others we feel that it goes down into the water, as is the case when we look at the sea or ocean. In other places still, the sun seems to set in the sand, as when we are in a desert with no hills or mountains around.

It appears from the text that Dhul-Qarnayn went westwards until he reached a point on the Atlantic coast which people believed to be at the end of dry land. He saw the sun setting in the sea. It is even

more likely that this was at a river mouth, where there would be plenty of weeds and the area muddy. Little lakes form in such situations and may look like water springs. He saw the sun setting there, going down in a spring of murky water. But it is impossible for us to define the area, because the chapter does not give us any clue. We have no other reliable source. Therefore, every view other than this cannot be considered accurate because it has no reliable basis.

At this lake of turbid and murky waters, Dhul-Qarnayn found a community and God gave him a choice. (18:86) Now, how did God say this to Dhul-Qarnayn? Was it revelation, or a mere statement of the situation, resulting from the fact that God had given him power over those people, so that he could determine whatever he wished to do with them. In this case, it would be just as if it was said to him: Here they are at your command: you may choose to punish them or to follow a lenient course of action. Both are possible. There is nothing to stop us understanding the text in either way. What is important to realize is that Dhul-Qarnayn declared his policy in the areas that came under his rule and their population became subject to his authority. (18:87-18:88)

This is a declaration that those who transgress the bounds of justice will be subject to their own punishment in this life. Then they will return to their Lord who is certain to inflict on them severe punishment that has no parallel in what is known in human life. On the other hand, pious and true believers will receive kindly treatment, generous reward, honor and help in all their affairs.

These are the outlines of just and good government. A true believer should receive from rulers every sort of kindly treatment and generous reward, while transgressors who are unjust to their fellow human beings should be punished severely. When those who do well in the community, pursuing a fair line of action in all their pursuits, receive a good reward for their actions, and when the unjust and oppressors receive a fair punishment and humiliation, then the whole community is motivated to follow the line of goodness. But when matters go wrong, and the unjust, oppressor and corrupt people are the ones who enjoy favor with the ruler, while those who are good and fair are persecuted, then the ruler's power becomes no more than a tool of corruption and misery for the whole community. Nothing remains fair. The whole society sinks into chaos.

After Dhul-Qarnayn's return from his westward journey he took his way eastward. Again we realize that his authority was well established, and that all means were made available to him. (18:89-18:91)

What we said about the setting of the sun is also true of its rising

place. What is meant here is the point where it rises in the east as we look up beyond the horizon. Again the Quran does not define the place. It simply describes it and the situation of the people Dhul-Qarnayn found there. (18:90) This suggests that the land was open, unscreened from the sun by any hills or trees. Thus when the sun rose, the people were directly exposed to it. This description applies to deserts and vast plateaus. It does not specify a particular location. All that we say is that it is likely that this place was in the far east, where the sun rose over its open, flat land. It might have also been on the east coast of Africa.

Another probability is that the description:'for whom We had provided no covering against it, means that those people were always in the nude and did not employ clothing. Hence, they were not screened from the sun.

Since Dhul-Qarnayn had announced his policy of government, the chapter does not repeat it here. Nor is any further action mentioned because God is fully aware of his intention and behavior.

It is important, however, to reflect very briefly here on an artistic touch in the image provided. The scene portrayed for us is open and clear: a blazing sun which is in no way screened from the people.

Similarly, Dhul-Qarnayn's conscience and intentions are open, known, fully to God Almighty. This provides harmony between the natural scene and human conscience in the inimitable style of the Quran.

Then he followed yet another way and [marched on] till, when he reached a place between the two mountain-barriers he found beneath them a people who could scarcely understand a word. (18:92-18:98)

Now we come to the third of Dhul-Qarnayn's journeys which took him to a place between the two mountain-barriers.' We cannot make any definite suggestion as to the exact location of this place, nor do we have any information about the nature of these barriers. All that we can understand from the text is that he reached a place lying in between two natural or man-made barriers, separated by a gap or low passage. Down there he found some backward people, whom the Quran describes as could scarcely understand a word.'

These people realized that Dhul-Qarnayn was both powerful and able. They also discovered that he was pious and God-conscious. Therefore, they offered him payment in return for erecting a barrier to stop Gog and Magog, who frequently attacked them from beyond the mountain barriers and used the passage in between, from wreaking havoc in their land. These people had exhausted all the means available to them, yet still they could not repel those evil forces.

Hence they were prepared to pay for a solution to their problem utilizing Dhul-Qarnayn's power.

Following the policy declared by that pious ruler, which was based on resisting all evil and corruption on earth, he declined to take their money, and offered instead to erect the barrier without charge. He judged that the easiest way to do so was to close the passage between the two mountain-barriers. However, he asked the backward people to help him by employing their physical strength. (18:95-18:96) They began to gather whatever blocks of iron were available. He put all these blocks in a heap to close the gap between the two barriers, so that the two mountain-sides became like two crusts covering a heap of iron articles in between.

(18:96) They were to generate air to increase the fire which heated the iron. The molten copper thus filled the gaps between the iron blocks, making the new barrier impregnable.

This method has recently been used in strengthening iron by adding a percentage of copper to it, thereby reinforcing it. It is to this fact that God guided Dhul- Qarnayn, recording the fact in His book many centuries before it was discovered by human science.

Thus the two natural barriers joined together with the man-made one, and the gap through which Gog and Magog launched their attacks was completely sealed.

Dhul-Qarnayn looked at the great work which he accomplished, yet experienced neither pride nor conceit. Nor was he elated by this edifice which testified to both his power and knowledge. Rather, he remembered God and thanked Him, acknowledging that it was He who guided him to what work should be done, and that his own power was granted to him by God, and that future events would take place according to His will. He also declared his belief that all mountains, walls and barriers are certain to be leveled before the Day of Judgment so that the whole earth will be flat. (18:98)

Dhu'l-Qarnayn is not mentioned in the chapter for his being an angel, but rather because of his good deeds. When the people he found in between the two mountain passes offered him money to build a barrier to protect them against Gog and Magog, he declined because: *He said: This is a mercy from my Lord. So when the promise of my Lord drew near, He will made it powder. And the promise of my Lord had been true.* (18:98)

Thus ends this passage which relates part of the history of Dhul-Qarnayn, a good example of a pious ruler who is given power and secure position as well as other means and facilities. He goes with his armies east and west, but he does not tyrannize or show conceit. Nor does he consider his conquering of other people's lands a means

to exploit individuals, communities and countries in order to ensure a luxurious life for himself or his people. He does not treat the vanquished people as slaves, making them the means for his self-aggrandizement. On the contrary, he spreads justice, assists the weak and backward, ensures that no aggression is launched against them, and charges nothing for his services. He utilizes the power God granted him in building proper and secure communities where everyone gets what rightfully belongs to him. He then attributes every good work he does to the grace of God, claiming no part of it for himself. Even at the height of his power, he does not forget God's power and that to Him he certainly shall return.

Now who were Gog and Magog? Where are they now? What did they do and what will happen to them? Such questions are very difficult to answer with any degree of accuracy. Our knowledge of them is limited to what is mentioned specifically in the Quran and in authentic ahadith. The Quran includes here a quotation of what Dhul-Qarnayn says. (18:98) This statement does not specify a time. God's promise to destroy the rampart may already have occurred when the Tatars swept across huge areas, destroying whole kingdoms.

Another mention of them is found in Chapter 21, The Prophets, where it is stated: When Gog and Magog are let loose and swarm down from every corner, when the true promise draws close [to its fulfillment], staring in horror shall be the eyes of the unbelievers. (21:96-21:97) Again this statement does not specify a time for the promised appearance of Gog and Magog. That God's promise has come near to fulfillment, in the sense that the Last Hour or the Day of Judgment is soon to come, is an accomplished fact ever since the time of the Prophet. (54:1) In God's reckoning, time has a totally different perspective from that of human reckoning. The time gap between the moment when the Hour becomes near and its actual occurrence may stretch to millions of years or centuries. Thus human beings may see this as a very long period of time, while, by God's standards, it may signify nothing more than a blink of an eye.

The chapter follows the reference by Dhul-Qarnayn to God's true promise with a scene from the Day of Judgment: On that day We shall leave them to surge like waves dashing against one another. The trumpet will be blown, and We shall gather them all together. And We shall, on that day, present hell, all spread out, for the unbelievers, who have turned a blind eye to My admonition and a deaf ear to My warning. (18:99-18:101)

This is a scene showing the movement of huge masses of people of all colors, races and geographical areas, belonging to all generations and times, after they have been resurrected and brought back

to life. They move across in a chaotic way, unaware of what is around them. They push each other like waves in the sea and mix like the surf raised by the waves. Then suddenly a trumpet is blown and they are gathered according to a specific order. (18:99)

We see also the ungrateful who turned away from remembrance of God as though their eyes were covered and their ears deaf. Now we see them with hell brought before them and they cannot turn away from it as they used to turn away from God's guidance. On that day, the option of turning away is not within their power. The cover over their eyes has been drawn, and they now see clearly the consequence of their deliberate turning away. This is a fair recompense.

The chapter provides symmetry between their turning away and their vision of hell as it is brought before them. The two actions are shown in contrast both in scene and movement.

This contrast is followed by a comment full of derision. (18:102) Do these ungrateful think that they can choose from among God's creatures that fully submit to Him some who could support them against God? Can these give them help or grant them protection against God's might? If such thoughts are entertained by them, then let them experience the results of such self-delusion. (18:102) This is an evil abode already prepared to receive them. There is no need for waiting. It is all ready to receive its unbelieving dwellers.

Sufi Commentator (underlines words refer to the actual Quranic verses preceded by or followed by commentary): They will ask you about Dhul Qarnayn. They say he was from the Eastern Roman Empire and lived not long ago. In terms of practice, Dhul Qarnayn refers to the heart which has two horns, two wings, the East and the West. Say: I will recount to you a remembrance of him. Truly We established him firmly on the earth and gave him a route to everything. We gave him strength in the land and power over the body. The heart had power over the body. This story differs from the bove story of Moses for here the heart is the king whose power reaches everywhere. God gave the heart power and it was capable of earning any wealth it wanted in the macrocosm or the microcosm and to walk wherever it wanted. It was given perfection in every way in order to reach its goals. And (it) pursued a route that responded to the body until when (it) reached the setting of the sun. This is where the spirit sets. He found it beginning to set in a spring of muddy water. That is, like the state of the body when it is digesting food. And (it) found near it a folk, that is, the forces of the self, the body, the senses, the spiritual forces and the inspirational forces.

We said: O Dhu-l Qarnayn, O heart, you could either chastise

them through spiritual exercises and killing them practically or adopt a way of kindness towards them and adopt a middle way and give each their share of what they need. It said: As for him who does wrong, by indulging in excess and not following the rules and following their lust, desires, anger, illusions and allusions, we will punish them with spiritual exercises and after that he will be returned to his Lord at the time of death, Who will punish him with a horrible punishment. He will cast them into the fire of nature where they will be tormented. This is more difficult to bear than the punishment on the Day of Resurrection. They will be annihilated.

But as for him who has believed, through cognizance and practical and theoretical wisdom, who admonish the senses to attain the positive traits, an exalted state, and one who has acted in accord with morality, through submission he will have the fairest recompense of the paradise of the attributes and manifestation of His lights. There will be light from their faces and flowing of rivers of knowledge by which you will recognize the believer. They will face the light when it separates from the profusion of knowledge, and we will speak to him of our command with ease.

After that (it) pursued a route until it reached the path that leads to God by renouncing any material attachment, seeking higher ground, the rising place of the sun. That is, where the spirit rises. (It) found it coming up on a folk who are two wise ones: theoretical and practical wisdom and spiritual strength, for whom We had not made any obstruction against it because they are light and because they understand fully the spiritual meaning as described earlier. Thus We surely comprehended of whatever was near him through awareness.

They had acquired the perfections of the exalted attributes. No one but Us knows about this because God is Omnipresent in both universes at the same time. No one in the universe can have such perfect knowledge except God and because of what is known as the Throne of God. Then (it pursued a route until when (it) reached between two embankments, meaning the two universes and that is his state and original station walking between the East and the West. This is a journey that sits it in its rightful position in exaltation. (It) found behind them a folk of human beings, physical forces and outer senses, who would almost not understand any saying because the physical forces and the outer senses do not know words and cannot speak. They said with the tongue of the present, O Dhu-l Qarnayn, Gog that is, claims, suspicion, idiosity, supersensitiveness,"and Magog imagination and superstition, are ones who make corruption in and on the earth of the body. They entice the body to indulge in their desires and to seek pleasures that are against what is orderly in

the universe and encourages them to do deeds that bring imbalances and hinder the laws of attaining the positive traits like wisdom. They cause corruption in the body and desires, lust and innovation which are against justice and which lead to the corruption of the seeds of the next generation.

They were denigrated so they said to the heart: Will we assign to thee payment, that is, some of our strength if you make an embankment between us and them? so that we may overcome desires by setting up a barrier between our hearts and them that will manifest as practical wisdom. (It) said: What my Lord has established firmly for me is better. That is, what God gave me of the meanings which result from practical experience for me is better along with the knowledge of the macrocosm and the microcosm and the ability to travel with ease from the East to the West, to attain positive traits and follow God's commands which God created you to do, so assist me with strength and I will make a fortification between you and between them. That dam is practical wisdom and the Shariah.

(It) said: Give me ingots of iron, from the practical images and do what you are ordered to do with firmness and certitude, until when he made level between the two cliffs, by balancing and by measuring the correct needs of both sides. Then (it) said to the animal forces, Blow life into the microcosm so its meaning becomes more significant and blow on the varying psychological manifestations including good qualities, blow until when he had made it a fire, that is, knowledge as part of universal knowledge while practical knowledge is particular knowledge of what to do.

(It) said: Give me molten copper to pour out over it, that is, the intention and sense of purpose which must exist between knowledge and actions. Knowledge without intentions and actions without purpose are not rewarded. With that molten lead, the spirit of knowledge will become one—not divided—and with it the spirit of knowledge and the body of actions will become one and united by molten lead. This is similar to the animal soul standing between the human self and the body. There was a barrier there, a veil, a foundation, a structure based on deeds and this was knowledge, conduct and the lead of intention and purpose. Then the self became the self at peace and recognized its original nature (*fitrat* Allah) and felt comfort and peace, understanding its intended state and believed.

So they were not able to scale it nor were they able to dig through it because it was exalted and because it contained all kinds of knowledge and proof which could neither be rejected nor overcome. The body and the senses are too ignorant of the truth to overcome it and to pierce through it. They took control of all the

capabilities. This barrier is the Divine Law, the Shariah. He said: The Divine Law is a mercy from my Lord to servants which brings them peacefulness, tranquility and maintains them. So when the promise of my Lord drew near, that is when death comes, He will make it powder the body into to the earth because it does not work when it is dead, without the soul or spirit and the promise of my Lord has been true.

Luqman

Luqman Given Wisdom

Chapter 31: The 57th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We gave Luqman wisdom that:*
Give thanks to God. And whoever gives thanks,
gives thanks only for himself. And whoever was ungrateful
— then, truly, God is Sufficient, Worthy of Praise. (31:12)
And when Luqman said to his son as he admonishes him:
O my son! Ascribe not partners with God.
Truly, association with God is, certainly,
a tremendous injustice. (31:13)
And We charged the human being
about ones who are his parents.
His mother carried him in feebleness on feebleness
and his weaning is in two years.
Give thanks to Me and to ones who are thy parents.
And to Me is the Homecoming. (31:14)
But if they both struggled with thee
that thou hast ascribed partners
with Me of what for thee is no knowledge,
then, obey them not.
And keep their company in the present
as one who is honorable
but follow the way of him who was penitent to Me.
Again, to Me will be your return
and I will tell you of what you had been doing. (31:15)
O my son! Truly, even if it be
the weight of a grain of a mustard seed
and though it be in a rock
or in the heavens or in or on the earth
God will bring it. Truly, God is Subtle, Aware. (31:16)
O my son! Perform the formal prayer
and command that which was moral
and prohibit that which was immoral
and have patience with whatever lights on you.
Truly that is the constancy of affairs.(31:17)
And turn not thy cheek away from humanity
nor walk through the earth exultantly.
Truly, God loves not any proud boaster. (31:18)
And be moderate in thy walking and lower thy voice.
Truly the most horrible of voices is, certainly,
the voice of the donkey. (31:19)

Commentary°

What is, then, the nature of this wisdom and what is its distinctive feature? It is summed up in a word. (31:12) This is true wisdom in action. The second step shows Luqman as he gives counsel to his son. It is the advice of a sage to his young son, which means that it is free of fault. No one can describe such advice as insincere or dishonest: how could they when it is from father to son? This advice states the major issue of faith that was referred to in the first presentation, as well as the issue of the hereafter, but it employs new influences here. (31:13)

Here we see relations with one's parents in a way that overflows with tenderness and compassion. (31:14) The [sign] makes clear the first rule concerning faith, which makes its bond the primary one in human life, taking precedence over that of blood and kinship. Strong and appealing as the latter bond is, it is lower on the scale than the bond of faith. (31:15) It adds here the truth of the life to come. (31:15) This is then followed with a very strong psychological factor demonstrating the extent, accuracy and comprehensiveness of God's knowledge. This is done in such a way that makes us shudder as we contemplate it against the background of the great universe. (31:16)

Luqman continues his admonition to his son, outlining the duties imposed by faith, including the all-important duty of enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong, and what follows from both of remaining patient in adversity, as difficulties are bound to be encountered by the advocates of faith. (31:17) This should be coupled with commitment to good manners. No advocate of faith should ever be arrogant, as such action is bound to spoil his advocacy efforts. (31:18-31:19) Not only does the chapter dismiss such proud, haughty and arrogant behavior, it looks upon it with contempt. This provides a marked psychological effect.

Zechariah

Zechariah Prays for a Child

Chapter 19: The 44th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *A remembrance of the mercy*
of thy Lord to His servant Zechariah (19:2)
when he cried out to his Lord, secretively crying out. (19:3)
He said: My Lord! Truly, I—my bones became feeble
and my head became studded with grayness of hair
and I be not disappointed
in my supplication to Thee, O my Lord. (19:4)
And, truly, I feared for my defenders after me.
And my woman had been a barren woman.
So bestow on me from that which proceeds
from Thy Presence a protector. (19:5)
He will inherit from me and inherit from the family of Jacob.
And make him, my Lord, pleasing. (19:6)
O Zechariah! Truly, We give thee the good tidings of a boy.
His name will be Yahya and We assigned it not
as a namesake for anyone before. (19:7)
He said: My Lord! How will I have a boy
while my woman had been a barren woman
and, surely, I reached an advanced old age? (19:8)
He said: It is about to be! Thy Lord said:
It is insignificant for Me and, surely, I created thee before
when thou wast nothing. (19:9)
Zechariah said: My Lord! Assign for me a sign.
He said: Thy sign is that thou wilt not speak to humanity
for three nights, although being without fault. (19:10)
So he went forth to his folk from the sanctuary.
Then, he revealed to them:
Glorify in the early morning dawn and evening. (19:11)

Commentary°

The signs 19:2-19:11 immediately begins the story of Zechariah and John (Yahya), in which compassion provides both the central idea and the overall atmosphere. Therefore, grace is mentioned at the outset. (19:2) The story begins with a scene of earnest supplication by Zechariah in total secrecy. (19:3-19:6) He is alone, addressing his appeal to God, away from watching eyes and listening ears. He wants to lay his troubled heart open before his Lord, recounting his worries. He addresses Him as if he were speaking to someone who is very close, without even using the Arabic address article. Needless to say,

his Lord hears and sees, without the need to be addressed or called upon. But a person troubled by worries finds comfort in vocalizing his concern. Most Gracious as He is, God knows this to be part of human nature. Hence, He likes that His servants pray to Him, making a clean breast of all that worries them. (40:60) When they do, they find relief from their heavy burden. They are reassured because they have assigned such burdens to the One who is more able and powerful. They feel that they are in contact with the Most Merciful who will not disappoint anyone who appeals to Him and relies on Him.

Zechariah complains to his Lord that his bones have become feeble, and when bones are feeble, the whole body is weak. After all, the bones are the stiffest part of the body. They form the skeleton that the muscles flesh up. He also complains that his head glistens with grey hair. The Quranic expression here shows the grayness of hair like a fire being ignited, and the man's head covered with this fire, so as to leave no black hair. Both feeble bones and grey hair signify old age and the weakness associated with it. It is this weakness that is the subject matter of Zechariah's complaint as he presents his case, and his hopes, to his Lord.

He then makes a clear acknowledgement. (19:4) He is used to having his prayers answered. He was not disappointed when he prayed to Him in his time of strength and vigor. Now in his old age and weakness, the need for his prayers to be answered is even more pressing.

Having presented his case, expressed his fears and hopes, he makes his request. The point is that he fears that those who will succeed him might not be up to looking after his heritage properly. Being one of the major prophets of the Children of Jacob, Zechariah's heritage involved serving God's cause as well as looking after the people of his household. One of those was Mary whose upbringing was entrusted to him. She served in the sanctuary that he managed. Again his property, which he managed properly and spent on only good purposes, was among his concerns. His worry was that those who succeeded him might not follow the course he had charted, perhaps because he knew them not to be up to that task. (19:5)

What added to his worries was the fact that he was childless. (19:5) This was his concern. As for his hope, he requested that God grant him a successor who would properly manage and look after the heritage of Jacob's household, i.e. his ancestors. (19:5-19:6) Zechariah, a God-conscious prophet, does not forget to specify what he hopes this successor would be like. (19:6) He should not be arrogant, tyrannical, or greedy. He should be one who is content with what God gives him. Such contentedness should furthermore spread

a sense of ease and happiness all round.

The moment of truth comes: the prayer is answered, bringing with it God's grace and acceptance. It is the Lord Himself that calls out to His servant from His sublime presence. (19:7)

This is but an example of God's grace as it is given in abundance to His servant whose secret supplication was passionate, and which clearly expressed his fears and hopes. Zechariah's prayer was motivated by fear that his heirs would not be able to look after the heritage of the true faith properly. He feared that they would not fulfill the trust in a way that earns God's pleasure. Hence, God bestowed on him what corresponded to his good intention.

Zechariah, who was deeply involved in his supplication, passionately expressing his desire and urging his case, was suddenly alerted by this speedy answer to his prayer. The reality stares him in the face: he is well advanced in years, his bones feeble, his hair completely grey, and his wife barren, having given him no child when he was in his prime. How is he to have a child of his own? He wants to be reassured and to know the means by which God will give him this son. (19:8)

He is facing the reality, as well as God's promise. He certainly trusts that God's promise will be fulfilled. He only wants reassurance and to know how, considering his circumstances, the fulfillment will take place. That would give him much needed reassurance. It is a perfectly normal condition in a situation like that faced by the noble and God-fearing prophet, Zechariah. Needless to say, he was only a human being who cannot ignore the reality. Hence, he would love to know how God will reverse it.

The answer to all his enquiries is straightforward. It is all perfectly easy for God to accomplish. God reminds him of something that he knows well, namely his own bringing into existence. This is something to be considered by every living creature. It applies to everything in this universe. (19:9)

Zechariah's eagerness to be reassured motivates him to ask for a sign indicating the realization of the happy news he was given. The sign God gave him was most fitting to the general atmosphere of his prayer and how it was answered. This sign gives him a further way to thank, glorify and praise God for giving him a son in his old age. He was to isolate himself from all worldly concerns for three days and live in direct contact with God. His speech would be normal when he glorified God, but he would not be able to utter a word of normal human speech. Yet he would remain in sound health, no illness affecting him. (19:10)

This was exactly what took place. (19:11) He wanted them to

live in the same mental condition he was in, to feel God's grace at its most abounding, and to give thanks for the grace He had bestowed on Zechariah, and on them.

Zechariah Lived in Accord with Morality

Chapter 6: The 55th Chapter Revealed

And Zechariah and Yahya and Jesus and Elias. All were of the ones who were in accord with morality. (6:85)

And Mention Zechariah

Chapter 21: The 73rd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And mention Zechariah*
when he cried out to his Lord:
My Lord! Forsake me not unassisted
and Thou art Best of the ones who inherit. (21:89)
So We responded to him and We bestowed Yahya on him.
And We made things right for his spouse and for him.
Truly, they had been competing with one another in good deeds
and they would call to Us with yearning and reverence.
And they had been ones who are humbled before Us. (21:90)

Commentary°

Along the same lines of its brief accounts of different prophets, the chapter gives a quick reference to Zechariah and his son, John, highlighting how God responded to Zechariah and answered his prayers. (21:89-21:90)

The story here it is given very briefly to fit with the rest of the chapter. It begins with Zechariah's prayer. Zachariah was in charge of the temple where the Children of Jacob offered their worship, before the birth of Jesus. However, Zechariah does not forget that the ultimate custodian of faith and property is God Himself. He only needs a successor who will attend well to the faith and to his family. People are the medium to fulfill God's will on earth.

The answer to this prayer was swift and direct at the same time. (21:90) The chapter overlooks all details to give us the ultimate result of God's response to Zechariah's prayer. Therefore, God gave an immediate response to that prayer. They yearned to earn God's pleasure and were in awe of incurring His displeasure. Their hearts were alive, always hopeful.

It was Zechariah's and his wife's good characteristics that deserved that God should bless them with a goodly son, John. Thus, the whole family was blessed, fully deserving of God's grace.

The Glad Tidings of Zechariah on Being Granted a Son.

Chapter 3: The 89th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *So her Lord received her*
with the very best acceptance.
And her bringing forth caused the very best to develop in her.
And Zechariah took charge of her.
Whenever Zechariah entered upon her in her sanctuary,
he found her with provision.
He said: O Mary! From where is this for thee (f)?
She said: This is from God.
Truly, God provides to whom He wills without reckoning. (3:37)
There Zechariah called to his Lord.
He said: My Lord!
Bestow on me good offspring from Thy Presence.
Truly, Thou art hearing the supplication. (3:38)
Then, the angels proclaimed to him while he was
one who stands to invoke blessings in the sanctuary
that God gives thee good tidings of Yahya
—one who establishes the Word of God as true
—a chief and concealer of secrets and a Prophet
among the ones in accord with morality. (3:39)
He said: My Lord! How is it I will have a boy while,
surely, I reached old age and my woman is a barren woman.
He said: Thus, God accomplishes what He wills. (3:40)
He said: My Lord! Assign a sign for me.
He said: Thy sign is that thou wilt not speak to humanity
for three days but by gesture and remember thy Lord frequently,
and glorify in the evening and early morning. (3:41)

Commentary°

He made Zechariah, the chief of-tie Jewish temple, the custody of which was entrusted to Aaron's priestly descendants, Mary's guardian. (3:37)

Mary was a blessed child, enjoying a state of Abundance. God ensured that she would always have an Abundance of everything. (3:37)

At that point, Zechariah prayed to his Lord. (3:38-3:41)

Zechariah, an old man without progeny, experienced a renewal of that yearning to have a child of his own. This is a natural desire which cannot be suppressed even by those who dedicate themselves to divine service and preoccupy themselves with worship. God has

made this desire a part of human nature so that life can continue and progress.

Here we find Zechariah, a man overtaken by old age, and his barren wife who had not had children even in her youth. As Zechariah brings up Mary, a goodly child provided with abundance from God, his deep natural desire to have offspring of his own begins to stir inside him. He turns to his Lord with a passionate prayer to give him out of His grace goodly offspring. (3:38) And what does this passionate prayer achieve? God answers his prayer in a way which is not restricted to age or what is familiar to people. It is an answer determined by God's absolute will. (3:39)

This is the sincere prayer of a man of pure heart who has placed his hopes in the One Who hears all prayers and Who is able to answer them when He chooses. The angels bid Zechariah rejoice at the news of the birth of a son whose name, John (Yahya), is known even before he is born. His qualities are also well known: he is to be a man of nobility and distinction, utterly chaste, able to control his desires and a firm believer who will confirm the word of God. Moreover, he will be a Prophet and a righteous man.

The way his prayer was answered surprised even Zechariah. After all, Zechariah was a man like us. He wanted to know from his Lord how this could happen when it was something supernatural by the standards of human beings. (3:40)

Zechariah was so overwhelmed by the news that he prayed to his Lord to give him a sign which would reassure him. God directs him at this point to that which gives him the perfect reassurance. He gives him a totally unfamiliar experience. The sign was that Zechariah's tongue was to be tied for three days when he tried to address people, but would remain untied when he addressed his Lord and glorified Him. (3:41)

The Quranic account stops here. We know that this is what actually took place.

Zechariah had an experience that was unfamiliar in his own life and in the lives of other beings. His tongue was unable to utter a word of ordinary speech while it uttered the praises and glorification of God. What law controls such a phenomenon? It is the law of God's absolute will. There can be no other explanation of this strange event. Similarly, there is no other explanation of the birth of John when his father had been overtaken by old age and his mother was barren.

John (Yahya)

Zechariah and John

Chapter 19: The 44th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *O Yahya! Take the Book with strength.*
And We gave him critical judgment while a lad. (19:12)
and Our continuous mercy from that which proceeds
from Our Presence and purity and he had been devout (19:13)
and pious to ones who are his parents
and be not haughty nor rebellious. (19:14)
And peace be on him the day on which he was given birth
and the day he dies and the day he is raised up, living. (19:15)

Commentary°

John (Yahya): A Prophet in His Own Right

The chapter now leaves Zechariah in complete silence dealing with other people and his glorification and praise of God. As that scene closes, the chapter reveals a new one in which we see John, the child given to Zechariah, as fully grown. It is his Lord who calls out to him from on high. (19:12) This follows the Quranic method of highlighting only the most important events, portraying images that are full of life and vigor.

Before we have even a single word about John himself, his account commences with an address from on high. It portrays an awesome scene giving us a good idea of John's position. It also shows us how God responded to Zachariah's prayers when he requested an heir who would fulfill the trust that he himself had been fulfilling, as it related both to faith and kin. Thus the first scene in which John is involved is the one where he is elected to bear the highest responsibility. (19:12) The book referred to here is the Torah, given to Moses. All the Israelite prophets were charged with its preservation and implementation. They were also given the task of educating people in the Torah, so that they would know what was lawful to them and what was unlawful. John inherited his father Zechariah. He is here told to rise to the task and fulfill his trust with all his resolve and strength. He must never weaken or slacken. He should never abdicate his responsibilities.

The chapter tells us what John was given to equip him for the great tasks he was assigned. (19:12-13) These were indeed the qualifications that suited him for his task. They provided great help in the fulfillment of his duties. Now let us look closer at these qualifications.

God granted him wisdom in his youth, which made him unique

in his personality, as he was unique in his birth and name. Wisdom is normally acquired as one grows in years, but in John's case, God granted him this in his early years.

God also granted him compassion as a special gift implanted in his very nature. He did not have to train or persuade himself to be compassionate. Such compassion is necessary for a Prophet who takes care of people's hearts and souls, trying always to set them on the course of goodness with ease.

John was further granted purity and cleanliness of heart and practice. Thus, he was able to counter the effects of other people's hard natures and wickedness and so help them grow in purity.

The other quality that served John well was his righteousness. He keenly sensed his close tie with God, and knew that He was not only watching him but with him in all situations, public or private. That completes the qualities that John was given to qualify him for his task. They were given to him when he was still in his youth, so that he could inherit his father, who had appealed to God to give him an heir.

Thus the account of John is brought to its conclusion with two verses. (19:14-15) As we see in this short passage, the line he followed throughout his life was clearly laid out. No further details of the story of Zechariah requesting a son, nor of that son John could have provided anything extra in as much as the lessons we can draw are concerned. Hence it is brought to a close.

If we leave aside for a moment the creation of the human being in his present form and in the way God tells us of how He created him, the birth of Jesus, son of Mary, should be considered the most remarkable event of human history. It is an event that has no parallel.

John Lived in Accord with Morality

Chapter 6: The 55th Chapter Revealed

And Zechariah and Yahya and Jesus and Elias.
All were of the ones who were in accord with morality. (6:85)

John Bestowed on Zechariah

Chapter 21: The 73rd Chapter Revealed

So We responded to him and We bestowed Yahya on him.
And We made things right for his wife and for him.
Truly they had been competing with one another
in good works and they would call to Us with yearning
and reverence and they had been
ones who are humbled before Us. (21:90)

Jesus

Jesus son of Mary

Chapter 19: The 44th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Jesus said: Truly, I am a servant of God.*
He gave me the Book and He made me a Prophet. (19:30)
And He made me one who is blessed
wherever I had been and He bequeathed to me the formal prayer
and the purifying alms as long as I continue living, (19:31)
and He makes me pious toward one who is my mother
and He makes me not haughty nor disappointed. (19:32)
And peace be on me the day I was given birth and the day I die
and the day I am raised up, living. (19:33)
That is Jesus son of Mary, a saying of The Truth.
They contest what is in it. (19:34)
It had not been for God that He takes to Himself a son.
Glory be to Him! When He decreed a command,
He not but says to it: Be! Then, it is! (19:35)
And, truly, God is my Lord and your Lord,
so worship Him. This is a straight path. (19:36)

Commentary°

It was God's will, then, to give them this example of the creation of Jesus, son of Mary, to remind people of His free-will and unrestrained power which cannot be subject to the laws He sets in operation. Jesus' birth has not been repeated in history, because it is only proper that God's law should come into operation and be seen with all its effects. This single event remains for all time indisputable evidence that God's will is always free, unshackled by any factor whatsoever. (19:21)

Jesus declared his status: a servant of God. He is not God's son, as some sects claim; nor was he divine as claimed by others, nor one of a Trinity constituting one God while being three, as claimed by others. He declares that God has made him a prophet, which means that he was neither God's son nor partner. God has blessed him and enjoined him to keep his prayers and be charitable throughout his life.

He is also enjoined to be very kind towards his mother and to show humility to his people. This means that he has a limited life duration, he dies and will be resurrected. God has bestowed on him peace, security and reassurance on the day of his birth, the day of his death and the day of his resurrection. The statement is very clear here

in respect of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It admits no argument or different interpretation.

The Quran does not add anything beyond painting this scene. It does not tell us how the people reacted to this miraculous event. Nor does it inform us what happened to Mary and her remarkable son after that. It does not mention anything about the time when he became a Prophet. (19:30) The theme here is the birth of Jesus. Hence, when the chapter has given its account of his birth, culminating in that miraculous scene, with Jesus talking to Mary's family, the scene is drawn to a close. This is followed by an emphatic statement of the truth concerning Jesus.

Such was, in the words of truth, Jesus the son of Mary, about whose nature they still dispute. It is not conceivable that God should beget a son. Limitless is He in His glory! When He wills a thing to be, He only says to it, Be,' and it is. God is my Lord and your Lord; so worship Him alone. That is a straight path. (19:34-19:36)

Jesus concludes his words by declaring the truth that God is his Lord and the Lord of all humanity. Therefore, they must worship Him alone, assigning to Him no partners. (19:36) With this statement made by Jesus himself, and with this account of his birth there is no room left for legend or myth in the whole affair. This is the full import of his statement and the way it is phrased.

The chapter then derides people for turning away from all th pointers to the right guidance in this present life. On that day their will be the sharpest of hearing and seeing: "How well they will hea and see on the day they will appear before Us. Truly the wrongdoers are today in evident error." (19:38) Their situation is amazing: they do not hear or see when hearing and seeing are the means to discern guidance and follow it in order to escape doom. Yet they hear and see extremely well when these faculties are used to stress their humiliation. They will be made to hear what they dislike and see what they are wont to avoid.

That is a day when distress will be at its most acute, when distress will be a quality of the day itself. They need to be warned, because such distress is of no use to anyone. (19:39) It is as though the day is directly linked to their unbelief and heedlessness.

Jesus Lived in Accord with Morality

Chapter 6: The 55th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And Zechariah and Yahya and Jesus and Elias. All were of the ones who were in accord with morality.* (6:85)

Jesus a Sign of God

Chapter 43: The 63rd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And when the son of Mary*
was cited as an example,
that is when thy folk cry aloud (43:57)
and said: Are our gods better or is he?
They cited him to thee not but to be argumentative.
Nay! They are a contentious folk. (43:58)
He was but a servant to whom We were gracious,
and We made him an example
to the Children of Jacob. (43:59)
And if We will, We would have assigned angels
to succeed among you on the earth. (43:60)
And, truly, he is with the knowledge of the Hour,
so contest not about it and follow Me.
This is a straight path. (43:61)
And let not Satan bar you.
Truly, he is a clear enemy to you. (43:62)
And when Jesus drew near
with the clear portents, he said:
Truly, I drew near you with wisdom
and in order to make manifest to you
some of that about which you are at variance in it.
So be God-conscious and obey me. (43:63)
Truly, God He is my Lord
and your Lord so worship Him.
This is a straight path. (43:64)

Commentary°

Whenever the son of Mary is cited as an example, your people raise an outcry, saying: 'Who is better: our deities or him? They cite him only to challenge you. They are contentious people. He was but a servant of Ours whom We had favored and made an example to the Children of Jacob. Had it been Our will, We could have made you angels, succeeding one another on earth. He is a portent of the Last Hour. Have no doubt about it, but follow Me: this is a straight path. Let not Satan debar you; for he is your sworn enemy. (43:57-43:65)

The signs speak about Jesus, stating the truth about him and what he preached, and how his people differed about him, both before and after his time: When Jesus came with clear signs. (43:63-43:65)

Thus, Jesus came to his people with clear signs, whether miracles God granted him or teachings that lead along the right way. (43:64) He never said that he was God, nor that he was God's son.

He never made any reference to any relationship between him and God other than that of his being God's servant. Furthermore, he stated that his message demarcated a straight path without bend or error. Yet those who came after him disputed much, splitting into factions like those who preceded him. In this they were wrongdoers, relying on no sure information. (43:65)

Jesus' message was addressed to the Jews. They were awaiting his coming to save them from their humiliating bondage to the Romans. Yet when he came, they denied and opposed him. Indeed, they even plotted to get him crucified. Jesus found them divided into numerous sects, the most important of which were as follows:

1. The Sadducees, named after Zadok, whose family retained custody of the Temple since the time of David and Solomon. According to their law, he must have been a descendant of Aaron, Moses' brother. For, custody of the Temple belonged to Aaron's descendants. Holding such an office, they were very strict on detailed worship rituals, denouncing any deviation. Nevertheless, in personal matters, they were lax, enjoying life's pleasures. They denied the Day of Resurrection.

2. The Pharisees. They were in dispute with the Sadducees, objecting to their strict observation of worship rituals while denying the Day of Resurrection. Their most common characteristic was their disregard of worldly pleasures, even though some of them took pride in their knowledge. Jesus denounced such an attitude.

3. The Samaritans. They were a mixture of Jews and Assyrians. They believed only in the Pentateuch, or the first five books of the Old Testament. They denied the later books accepted by other Jews as part of their scripture.

4. The Essenes, or Essenians. These were influenced by some philosophical doctrines, living in isolation of other Jewish sects. Theirs was an ascetic, strictly organized sect.

In addition, there were numerous other sects that gave rise to much confusion in Jewish beliefs and traditions. The Jews at the time tolerated humiliation under the Romans, and awaited their deliverance at the hands of the Messiah. When the Messiah, Jesus Christ, came to them declaring that: 'God is my Lord and your Lord: so worship Him alone, and preaching a law of tolerance and spiritualism, he was opposed by the professional clerics who gave paramount importance to rituals. He is reported to have said about them: They make loads that are hard to carry and lay them on the shoulders of the people. However, they are not willing to lift a finger to move them. They do everything to attract people's attention. They make their headbands large and the tassels on their shawls long. They love

the place of honor at dinners and the front seats in synagogues. They love to be greeted in the marketplaces and to have people call them Rabbi. (Matthew 23:4-7) He is also quoted as addressing them thus: You, blind guides! You strain gnats out of your wine, but you swallow camels. How horrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You clean the outsides of cups and dishes. But inside they are full of greed and uncontrolled desires. You blind Pharisees! First clean the inside of the cups and dishes so that the outside may also be clean. How horrible it will be for you, scribes and Pharisees! You hypocrites! You are like whitewashed graves that look beautiful on the outside but inside are full of dead people's bones and every kind of impurity. (Matthew 23:24-27)

When we read today these words of Jesus and similar texts, we realize how applicable they are to professional clerics of all religions. They are all of the same type.

Jesus' term on earth came to its end and he went to his Lord. Later, his followers split into groups and factions: some made him a deity; some made him the son of God; others make God a trinity of three one of whom is Jesus. The pure concept of God's oneness preached by Jesus has, thus, been lost, as also his call on people to worship God alone, pure in their submission to Him. (23:65) Then the pagan Arabs disputed with the Prophet concerning Jesus, basing their argument on what these different factions fabricated and weaved of legends about him.

When the signs refer to wrongdoers, it includes those factions that disputed about Jesus together with the pagan Arabs who argued with the Prophet on the basis of what those factions perpetrated. It draws a long, spectacular scene showing what happens to them on the Day of Judgement and adds an image of what happens to the God-fearing who receive His favors in heaven:

What are they waiting for other than the Last Hour, which will come upon them all of a sudden and take them unawares? On that Day, friends will become enemies to one another, except for the God-conscious. However, what comes over and above desire satisfaction is that it is all pleasant to the eye, adding beauty to gratification. (43:71) Yet there is more to this blessed enjoyment: there is something greater and far more honorable. They are honored by an address from on high. (43:71-43:73)

Mary, a Sign of God

Chapter 23: The 74th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And We made the son of Mary and his mother a sign,*

and We gave them refuge on a hillside, a stopping place,
and a spring of water. (23:50)

Commentary°

There are a number of different reports about the hill described here as a 'lofty place' and its exact location. (23:49-23:50) Was it in Egypt, Damascus or Jerusalem? These were the places where Mary went with her son during his childhood and youth, as mentioned in Christian Scriptures. But knowing the exact location is not of vital importance. It is more important to know that God gave them both a goodly abode where fine plants grew and clear water was plentiful. Thus, they felt that God took care of them both.

At this point in its quick references to earlier Messengers the chapter makes its address to the followers of all Messengers, as though they were all gathered together. Thus, the separating gulfs of time and place are shown to be meaningless when compared to the true bond of faith that unites them all.

Jesus Given Clear Signs and Confirmed with the Hallowed Spirit

Chapter 2: The 87th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: ... *And We gave Jesus son of Mary the clear portents*
and confirmed him with the hallowed Spirit ... (2:253)

Jesus the Messiah Announced to Mary

Chapter 3: The 89th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *Mention when the angels said: O Mary! Truly God*
gives you (f) good tidings of a Word from Him.
His name is Messiah—Jesus son of Mary—
well-esteemed in the present and the world to come
and of the ones who are brought near.
And he will speak to humanity from the cradle
and in manhood and be among
the ones in accord with morality. (3:46)
She said: My Lord! How is it I will be with child
when no mortal touches me?
He said: Thus, God creates whatever He wills.
When He decreed a command, then, He only says to it:
Be! Then, it is! (3:47)
And He teaches him the Book and wisdom
and the Torah and the Gospel (3:48)
to be a Messenger to the Children of Jacob saying that:
Surely I drew near you with a sign from your Lord

that I will create for you out of clay a likeness of a bird.
Then, I breathe into it and it will become a bird
with the permission of God.
And I cure one who is blind from birth and the leper
and give life to dead mortals with the permission of God.
And I tell you what you eat
and what you store up in your houses.
Truly, in that is a sign for you
if you had been ones who believe. (3:49)
And I come with that which establishes as true
what was before me of the Torah, and permit you
some of what was forbidden to you.
And I drew near you with a sign from your Lord.
So be God-conscious of God and obey Me. (3:50)
Truly, God is my Lord and
your Lord so worship Him.
This is a straight path. (3:51)
And when Jesus became conscious
of their ingratitude, he said:
Who are my helpers for God?
The disciples said: We will be helpers for God.
We believed in God and bear thee witness
that we are ones who submit to God. (3:52)
*Our Lord! We believed in what **You** had caused to descend.*
And we followed the Messenger so write us down
with the ones who bear witness. (3:53)
And they planned and God planned.
And God is Best of the ones who plan. (3:54)

Promise of Rescue to Jesus and the Christians Invited to the Spiritual Contest

Madinah: *Mention when God said: O Jesus!*
*I will be One Who Gathers **you** and One Who Elevates **you***
*to Myself and One Who Purifies **you***
from those who were ungrateful,
*and One Who Makes those who followed **you***
above those who were ungrateful
until the Day of Resurrection.
Again, you will return to Me.
Then, I will give judgment between you
about what you had been at variance in it. (3:55)
So as for those who were ungrateful,
then, I will punish them with a severe punishment

in the present and the world to come.
And for them there is no one who helps. (3:56)
And to those who believed
and did as the ones in accord with morality,
We will pay them their account with full compensation.
And God loves not the ones who are unjust. (3:57)
These We recount to you are of the signs
and the wise remembrance. (3:58)
Truly the parable of Jesus with God is like the parable of Adam.
He created him from earth dust.
Again, He said to him: Be! Then, he is! (3:59)

Commentary°

The central theme of Chapter 3 revolves around the issue of the Oneness of God, i.e. *tawhid*. The story of Jesus and the other accounts related to it reinforce this concept as they refute and completely exclude the idea of offspring or partners as far as God is concerned. The chapter rejects these notions as false and naïve, and presents the birth and life of Mary and Jesus in such a manner that leaves no room for doubting his full humanity or that he was one of God's Messengers; whatever applies to them applies to him. It explains the supernatural phenomena that accompanied the birth and life of Jesus in simple, clear and reassuring terms. The whole issue is presented as a natural and normal one that should raise no confusion or suspicion. It simply says: The case of Jesus in the sight of God is the same as the case of Adam. He created him of dust and then said to him, Be, and he was. (3:59) Believing hearts find certainty and peace in these words, and wonder how this evident concept could ever have been shrouded in doubt and confusion.

Jesus Not Crucified but Taken to Heaven

Chapter 4: The 92nd Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *And for their saying: We have killed the Messiah*
Jesus son of Mary, the Messenger of God
and they killed him not,
nor they crucified him but a likeness was shown to them.
And truly those who were at variance in it
are in uncertainty about it.
They have no knowledge about it
but are pursuing an opinion.
And they for certain killed him not. (4:157)

The Quran Bears Witness to the Previous Books or Scriptures

Madinah: *O People of the Book!*
Go not beyond the limits in your way of life
and say not about God but The Truth:
That the Messiah, Jesus son of Mary,
was a Messenger of God and His Word
that He cast to Mary and a Spirit from Him.
So believe in God and His Messengers.
And say not: Three. To refrain yourselves from it is better for you.
There is only One God. Glory be to Him that He have a son!
To Him belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in
and on the earth and God sufficed as a Trustee. (4:171)
The Messiah will never disdain that he be a servant of God,
nor the angels, ones who are brought near to Him.
And whoever disdains His worship and grows arrogant,
He will assemble them altogether to Himself.$:172)

Commentary°

This sign describes the claim that God has a son as overstepping the bounds of truth. It is nothing short of the type of excess which enabled the people who had received earlier revelations to make false claims about God and allege that He had a son. Far removed is such an idea from Him. They also allege that God is a trinity.

Infinite is God in His glory. He neither has nor needs any partner. Nor is anyone similar to Him in any way. The very fact that He is the Creator means that He is different from all creatures. It stands to reason that the Creator should be different from His creation, the owner different from his property. (4:171)

That the birth of Jesus without a father seems miraculous and preternatural to human beings is only because it is totally different from what is familiar. We must remember that what is familiar to us is certainly not all that is in the universe. Nor are the natural laws we know the only laws in the universe. We must remember that God creates natural laws and sets them into operation according to His will, which is unrestricted, free, absolute.

As regards Jesus Christ, God says the following, and what He says is always true. (4:171) He is, then, definitely and undoubtedly a Messenger from God. He is the same as the rest of God's Messengers, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Muhammad, and the other most honorable servants of God whom He selected to convey His message to humanity at various points in time.

Formerly, God breathed of His spirit into the clay from which

Adam was made, and thus Adam became a man. (38:71-2) In the context of the creation of Jesus and referring to Jesus's mother. .(21:91) The matter is, then, not without precedent. The spirit to which reference is made in all these statements is the same. None of the people who received revelations before Islam and who believed in Adam's creation and that God breathed into him of His spirit claim that Adam was a god, or one of the elements which constitute the Divine Being, as some people allege regarding Jesus. The two cases are similar: both have spirit breathed into them and both were created in the same fashion. Indeed, Adam was created without either a father or a mother, while Jesus was created having a mother. (3:59)

Jesus Given the Gospel

Chapter 57: The 94th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *Again, We sent Our Messengers*
following their footsteps.
And We sent following them Jesus son of Mary.
And We gave him the Gospel.
And We assigned in the hearts
of those who followed him,
tenderness and mercy.
But as for monasticism,
they made it up themselves.
We prescribed it not for them
but they were so looking
for the contentment of God.
Then, they gave it not the attention
giving its right attention
so We gave those who believed
among them their compensation.
And many of them are ones who disobey. (57:27)

Commentary°

At this point, Chapter 57 mentions a prominent characteristic of those who followed Jesus. (57:27) These are the natural fruits of his message that emphasizes spiritual purity. Indeed such compassion and mercy are clearly noticed among those who truly believe in Jesus' message and who properly follow him. Other verses in the Quran refer to these qualities.

The sign mentions another phenomenon that prevailed among the followers of Jesus. (57:27) The weightier explanation of this statement is that monastic asceticism, well known in Christian his-

tory, was a personal choice, an invention made by some of Jesus' followers who sought to win God's acceptance. Through it, they sought to steer themselves away from the burdens of this life and its many attractions. It was not something that God imposed on them in the first place. Yet when they made this choice, binding themselves to it, they were committed before God to observe its requirements such as purity, contentment, chastity, worship and piety; this so as to dedicate themselves to God's cause. However, such asceticism lost its grip on reality, and ended up as mere rituals devoid of spirituality. Many are those who make a show of it, without real substance. The fact is that only the very few are capable of rigorously fulfilling its requirements. (57:27) God does not value people by appearances and rituals; He assigns their value on the basis of their actions and intentions. He holds them to account on the basis of what they truly feel and how they actually conduct themselves. He alone knows the reality of what they harbour in their hearts.

Jesus Tells of the Advent of Muhammad

Chapter 61: The 109th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *And when Jesus son of Mary said:*
O Children of Jacob!
I am the Messenger of God to you,
one who establishes as true
what was in advance of me in the Torah
and one who gives good tidings
of a Messenger to approach after me.
His name will be Ahmad.
But when he brought about the clear portents
to them, they said: This is clear sorcery! (61:6)

Commentary°

The chapter then mentions Jesus' message to establish that Jesus was sent to carry on Moses' earlier message, confirming what was revealed before him of the Torah. He was also given the task of paving the way for the final message, giving news of the Messenger who was to carry it, and serving as a link between the first and the last divine religions. (61:6) Therefore, his task was to carry the trust of the divine faith after Moses and then to give it to the Messenger whose coming he announced.

Thus we see how the divine faith moved from one stage to the next, with all the stages interrelated, moving in the same direction, stretching from heaven to the earth: a long chain moving from link to link. This is the proper image, one worthy of God's design and

constitution. It is basically the same approach, taking slightly different forms, according to what suits the needs, experience, knowledge and potential of humanity at each particular stage, until it reaches full maturity. Only then does the last stage arrive and the final form of divine faith be given: perfect, complete, addressing a mature mind that has benefited from all past experience. It opens the way so that the human mind works to its full potential within the method set for man and his abilities.

Jesus' Mission to the Children of Jacob Referred To

Madinah: *O those who believed! Be helpers of God*
as Jesus son of Mary said to the disciples:
Who are my helpers for God? The disciples said:
We are the helpers for God.
Then, a section believed of the Children of Jacob
and a section were ungrateful.
So We confirmed those who believed against their enemies.
And they became ones who are prominent. (61:14)

Commentary°

The helpers or disciples were Jesus Christ's pupils. It is said that they were twelve men who were close to him and who dedicated themselves to learning from him. They continued to spread his message and commandments after his term was over. This verse does not give us a detailed story: it simply outlines an attitude. Hence, we look at it in the context it is given and for the purpose it serves.

Place yourselves in this noble position to which He elevates you. (61:14) Is there a position that is higher and more noble than that of being a supporter of God and His cause? This bargain bestows an honor that is greater than heaven and its happiness. (61:14) They were chosen for this task and earned this honor. Jesus came to give the news of the last Prophet and the last religion. It is only fitting that Muhammad's followers should be chosen for this permanent task, just as Christ's disciples were chosen for it during their period of time. This is clearly apparent in the way the dialogue is presented in this verse.

But what was the result then? (61:14) The aim of this last address is to strengthen the resolve of the believers in the last religion, the heirs of the divine message. They are the ones charged with a great task, namely the implementation of God's system on earth. They are encouraged to come forward to support God's cause. Eventual victory is assured for believers who support God's cause.

Thus the [sign] concludes with a verse that fits the general context and drift of the chapter, yet has a special color and effect. It enriches an already rich variety of colors and effects.

The Messiah, son of Mary, is Not God

Chapter 5: The 112th Chapter Revealed

Certainly ungrateful are those who said:
Truly God is the Messiah, the son of Mary.
Say: Who then has a sway over God?
If He wanted to He would have caused to perish
the Messiah son of Mary and his mother
and whatever is in and on the earth altogether.
To God belongs the dominion f the heavens and the earth
and what is between the two.
He creates what He wills.
And God is Powerful over everything. (5:17)

Evidence from the Gospel

Madinah: *And We sent following in their footsteps,*
Jesus son of Mary, one who establishes as true
what was before him in the Torah.
And We gave him the Gospel in which is guidance and light,
and that which establishes as true
what was before him in the Torah
and a guidance and admonishment
for the ones who are God-conscious. (5:46)

Commentary°

It is also endorsed by the Gospel God revealed to Jesus, son of Mary, which contains: guidance and light, confirming what had already been revealed before it in the Torah and giving guidance and admonition to the God-fearing. (5:46) Let, then, the followers of the Gospel judge in accordance with what God has revealed therein.

Jesus Not the Son of God

Madinah: *And, certainly, were ungrateful those who said:*
Truly, God is He, the Messiah, son of Mary, but the Messiah said:
O Children of Jacob! Worship God, my Lord and your Lord.
Truly, whoever ascribes partners with God, then, surely,
God forbade the Garden to him.
And his place of shelter will be the fire.
And for the ones who are unjust, there are no helpers. (5:72)
Certainly, ungrateful were those who said:

Truly, God is the third of three.
There is no god but One God.
And if they refrain not themselves from what they say,
there will afflict those who were ungrateful
among them a painful punishment. (5:73)
Will they not, then, turn to God for forgiveness
and ask for His forgiveness?
And God is Forgiving, Compassionate. (5:74)
The Messiah son of Mary was not but a Messenger.
Surely, Messengers passed away before him.
And his mother was a just person (f).
They both had been eating food.
Look on how We make manifest the signs to them.
Again, look on how they are misled! (5:75)
Say: Worship you other than God what controls
neither hurt nor profit for you?
And God, He is The Hearing, The Knowing. (5:76)
Say: O People of the Book!
Go not beyond limits in your way of life
but with The Truth and follow not the desires of the folk who,
Surely, went astray before.
And they caused many to go astray.
And they themselves went astray from the right way. (5:77)

Commentary°

The Christ himself said: Children of Jacob, worship God, my Lord and your Lord. Whoever associates partners with God, God shall forbid him entrance into Paradise and his abode will be the Fire. Wrongdoers will have no helpers. (5:72) We see how Jesus Christ himself has warned them, but they paid no heed. After he departed from them, they followed the deviant path he warned them against, because it is certain to forbid them entrance into Paradise and make them suffer in the fire of Hell. They forgot what Christ told them: Children of Jacob, worship God, my Lord and your Lord. He declared to them that he and they stood in the same position of servitude to God, the One God who has no partners.

The Quran makes a final judgement on all their blasphemous claims. (5:73) It states the truth which constitutes the basis of every faith preached by every one of God's Messengers. It threatens them with the punishment prepared for those who make such blasphemous assertions and believe in them. The unbelievers are the ones who continue to make such assertions which God has ruled to be a clear denial of faith.

These stern warnings are followed by encouragement and persuasion. (5:74) The door to repentance and forgiveness is, thus, left open. God's forgiveness and mercy are certain to be forthcoming, if sought before it is too late.

Jesus Cursed the Ungrateful Among the Children of Jacob

Madinah: *Those who were ungrateful were cursed*
among the Children of Jacob by the tongue of David
and that of Jesus son of Mary.
That was because they would rebel
and they had been exceeding the limits. (5:78)

God Confirmed Jesus with the Hallowed Spirit

Madinah: *Mention when God said: O Jesus son of Mary!*
Remember My divine blessing on thee
*and on the one who is **your** mother,*
*when I confirmed **you**, Jesus, with the hallowed Spirit*
so that thou hast spoken to humanity from the cradle
and in manhood and when I taught thee the Book
and wisdom and the Torah and the Gospel
and when thou hast created from clay
the likeness of a bird with My permission
and thou hast breathed into it
and it becomes a bird with My permission
and thou hast cured one blind from birth and the leper
with My permission and when thou hast brought out the dead
with My permission and when I limited the Children of Israel
*from **you** when **you** had drawn near them*
with the clear portents.
And those who were ungrateful among them said:
This is nothing but clear sorcery. (5:110)
Mention when I inspired the disciples:
Believe in Me and My Messenger.
They said: We believed and bear witness
that we are ones who submit to God. (5:111)
Mention when the disciples said:
O Jesus son of Mary!
Is thy Lord able to send down to us
a table spread with food from heaven?
Jesus said: Be God-conscious,
if you had been ones who believe. (5:112)
They said: We want that we eat of it so that our hearts be at rest

and we know that thou, surely, wast sincere to us and
that we be the ones who bear witness to that. (5:113)
Jesus son of Mary said: O God! Our Lord!
Cause to descend for us a table spread with food from heaven
that it will be a festival for the first of us
and the last of us and a sign from Thee. And provide us.
And Thou art Best of the ones who provide. (5:114)
God said:
Truly, I am One Who Sends Down to you.
But whoever is ungrateful after that among you,
then, I will punish him with a punishment
that I punish not anyone of the worlds. (5:115)

TEACHINGS OF JESUS CORRUPTED AFTER HIS DEPARTURE

Madinah: *And mention when God said: O Jesus son of Mary!*
Had ***you*** *said to humanity:*
Take me and my mother to yourselves other than God?
He would say: Glory be to You! It is not for me
that I say what there is no right for me to say.
If I had been saying it, then, surely, ***You*** *would have known it.*
You *have known what is in my sou*
and I know not what is in ***Your*** *Soul*
Truly, ***You, You*** *alone are Knower of the unseen.* (5:116)
I said not to them but what ***You*** *had commanded me of it:*
That you worship God, my Lord and your Lord.
And I had been witness over them
as long as I continued among them.
Then, when ***You*** *had gathered me to* ***Yourself,***
You *had been The Watcher over them.* ***You*** *are, truly,*
Witness over everything. (5:117)
If ***You*** *are to punish them, then, they are but Thy servants.*
And if Thou art to forgive them truly,
Thou, Thou alone art The Almighty, The Wise. (5:118)
God would say: This Day the ones who are sincere will profit
from their sincerity.
For them are Gardens beneath which rivers run,
ones who will dwell in them forever, eternally.
God was well-pleased with them
and they are well-pleased with Him.
That is the winning the sublime triumph. (5:119)
To God belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth
and whatever is in and on them.

And He is Powerful over everything. (5:120)

Commentary°

The account given in these passages address Jesus, son of Mary, in front of all those who attributed to him divine status, worshipped him and weaved around him and his mother all sorts of exaggerated stories. The address reminds him of the grace God bestowed on him and on his mother, enumerating the miracles God gave him to help people to believe in his message. Yet some people denied his message most violently, while others were dazzled with the miracles he was given. On account of such miracles they elevated him to the status of a deity, when all miracles are given by God, who created him, gave him a message and supported him.

Here we have a full account of the various aspects of grace bestowed by God on Jesus and his mother, Mary. To start with, he was supported by the Holy Spirit in his infancy. Then, he was talking to people long before children normally start to talk, absolving his mother of all suspicion raised around her on account of his miraculous birth that had no parallel in history. He also talked to them later when as a grown man he was again supported by the Holy Spirit, Gabriel. He was also given knowledge of the Book and wisdom. He was born without knowledge of reading and writing, but God gave him that knowledge, as He imparted to him wisdom in order to deal with different situations in the best way. God also taught him the Torah which had been given to the Children of Israel and the Gospel which God gave him to confirm the Torah.

Furthermore, God gave Jesus several miraculous things that no human being could accomplish without God's support. Thus, he could fashion a bird shape of clay and breathe into it, and all at once it became a living bird. How did this happen? We do not know, because we still do not know how God creates life. Moreover, he adds quality to life: he cures a person born blind, by God's leave, when medicine does not know how to give eyesight to such a person. God, who gives human beings their faculty of seeing, is able to open a blind person's eyes to see the light. Jesus also cured the leper without using any medicine. Medication is merely a tool for accomplishing God's will of curing a patient, but the One who has willed to cure the patient is able to change the tools by which He accomplishes His purpose, or to achieve it without any tool. Again Jesus is able to restore life to the dead, by God's leave. The One who initiates life is able to restore it at any tune.

God further reminds Jesus of His favors when He extended His protection to him against the Israelites who, when he produced all

these miracles, denied him claiming that they were plain sorcery. On the one hand they did not wish to deny the miracles, witnessed by thousands of people, and yet they were too stubborn to submit to the message they imparted. God protected him and they were unable to kill or crucify him, as they were keen to do. God simply gathered him and elevated him to Himself. Another reminder to Jesus speaks of how God inspired the disciples to believe in Him and His Messenger, Jesus, and they do so, appealing to him to bear witness to their acceptance of the faith and total self-surrender to God. (5:111)

All these were favors God, out of His grace, gave to Jesus to serve as clear proof of his status and message. Many of his followers, however, used them erroneously, deviating from the truth and fabricating falsehood. Here Jesus is reminded of all these in the presence of the Supreme Company and in front of all mankind, including those people who exaggerated his status and attributed to him what was not his. When these favors are held in front of him, those who gave him a status far beyond his own humanity will see and hear, and, in consequence, they will be humiliated in the full sight of all humanity.

In addition to the favors bestowed on Jesus and his mother, the chapter relates some of the favors God granted to his followers, and the miracles with which God supported him, as seen by his disciples. (5:112-5:115)

Thus, God reminds Jesus, son of Mary, of His favors when h stands in front of his people on the Day of Judgement, with all creatures looking on: The disciples said: Jesus, son of Mary! Can your Lord send down to us a repast from heaven? (5:112) The disciples, the closest to Jesus of all his followers, were aware that he was a human being, born to Mary. They address him according to his status, which they knew very well. They knew that he was neither a son of God nor a deity, but a servant of God. They also knew that it was his Lord who accomplished all those miraculous events through him. He himself could not do any of them by his own initiative. Hence, when they requested a further miracle, they did not ask him to accomplish it himself, because they were aware that he could not do so. (5:112)

We note in Jesus's supplication how he makes his address with all the humility of a servant whose Lord has honored him. He first makes it clear that he recognizes Him, saying: God, our Lord! Then he states his appeal, requesting Him to give them a repast that would bring them joy and goodness, so as to be like a festival for everyone of them. He acknowledges that it would all be provided by God, the best of all providers. Jesus is thus shown to recognize his own status as a servant of God and to recognize God's status as Lord of all the

worlds. This is shown in front of all mankind, particularly his people on that great and eventful day.

God answers the prayer of his good servant, Jesus son of Mary, but with the seriousness that befits His majesty. They asked for a miracle, and He will give them the miracle they requested, on condition that He will severely punish anyone who continues to disbelieve after the miracle is granted. Indeed that punishment will surpass in severity any other punishment inflicted on any other of God's servants. (5:115)

This seriousness is important, so that requests for miracles are not made as idle talk. Moreover, those who ask for proof and continue to disbelieve after they have been given what they have asked for must not go unpunished. It has been God's law, applicable to all past communities, that those who continued to deny the messages preached by God's messengers after the miracles were given them were annihilated. In this instance, however, the statement may mean that they would be punished here in this life, or in the life to come.

The passage does not follow the account of the Repast after stating God's warning. It moves on to deal with the central issue of Godhead and Lordship, which permeates the whole passage. We go back now to that great scene which continues to be held up for all onlookers. We listen now to a straightforward questioning about the Divinity claimed for Jesus and his mother. The person now interrogated is none other than Jesus, facing those who worshipped him. They listen to him as he, surprised and amazed, disclaims before his Lord all knowledge of such a grievous sin they attach to him. He is, indeed, innocent and it is all fabrication:

And God will say: Jesus, son of Mary! Did you say to people, Worship me and my mother as deities beside God? [Jesus] answered: Limitless are You in Your glory! I could never have claimed what I have no right to [say]! Had I said this, You would certainly have known it. You know all that is within myself whereas I do not know what is in Yourself. Most certainly, it is You alone who fully knows all that lies beyond the reach of human perception. Nothing did I tell them beyond what You bade me [to say]: Worship God, who is my Lord and your Lord. I was witness to what they did as long as I lived in their midst. Then when You took me to Yourself, You have been watching over them. You are indeed a witness to all things. If You punish them, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them, You are indeed Almighty, Wise." (5:116-5:118)

Limitless is God in His glory! He knows very well what Jesus said to people. But this worrying interrogation on that fearful day is intended for people other than the one to whom it is addressed. Put-

ting it in this form adds to our abhorrence of the attitude of those who attributed Divinity to Jesus, God's noble and great servant. For anyone of God's servants to claim to be God, knowing that he is no more than a servant of God, is indeed a horrible offense that no normal human being could perpetrate. Is it conceivable, then, that one of God's messengers who were granted the strongest resolve should perpetrate it? Or is it even conceivable that this perpetrator should be Jesus son of Mary, when God gave him all those favors before and after he was chosen to bear His message? How does he feel when questioned about this claim of Godhead, when he is a good servant of God?

Therefore, his answer is tinged with awe and fear. He starts by glorifying God and follows this immediately with an absolute denial of any such thoughts or of any such claims: [Jesus] answered: Limitless are You in Your glory! I could never have claimed what I have no right to [say]! (5:116) In his own defense, he seeks God as witness to his innocence of such claims. He owns to his humble position of being only a servant to God who has all attributes of the Godhead. "Had I said this, You would certainly have known it. You know all that is within myself whereas I do not know what is in Yourself. Most certainly, it is You alone who fully knows all that lies beyond the reach of human perception." (5:116)

Now, after having made this long praise of God, he is able to state what he did and did not say, declaring that he said nothing to his community other than calling on them to worship God alone, and stating that, like them, he is no more than God's servant. "Nothing did I tell them beyond what You bade me [to say]: `Worship God, who is my Lord and your Lord." (5:117)

He then disclaims any responsibility for what they did after the end of his time on earth. Taken at face value, the Quranic text means that God gathered Jesus then elevated him to Himself. Some reports indicate that he is alive with God. In my view, there can be no contradiction between the two situations; for God may have determined that Jesus had completed his term of life on earth, and He may have taken him so that he be alive with Him. Martyrs die and finish their lives on earth, but they are alive with God. We do not know what form their life with God takes, nor do we know what form of life Jesus has; but he says here to his Lord that he does not know what they did or said after he was gathered from life on earth: "I was witness to what they did as long as I lived in their midst. Then when You took me to Yourself, You have been watching over them. You are indeed a witness to all things." (5:117)

He concludes with leaving the fate of his people absolutely to

God, stating at the same time that they are His servants and at His disposal. God is able to forgive them or to punish them. Whether He decides on one course or the other, that decision is based on His wisdom, which operates in the same measure whichever fate He determines for them. "If You punish them, they are Your servants; and if You forgive them, You are indeed Almighty, Wise." (5:118) This is all that Jesus, a model servant of God, says in this awesome position.

But where are those who invented such grave falsehood about Jesus in this whole scene? The passage does not mention them once. They may be feeling their ignominy and wish not to show themselves. We, therefore, leave them where the surah has left them. We will only look now at the final part in that remarkable scene:

God will say: This is the day when their truthfulness shall benefit all who have been truthful. Theirs shall be gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide forever. God is well pleased with them, and they are well pleased with Him. That is the supreme triumph. (5:119) The appropriate comment on the falsehood fabricated by liars against the noble Prophet Jesus, concerning the most serious issue of all, i.e. the issue of Godhead, is to state that truth will be of great benefit to its upholders on that awesome day. This is the day when their truthfulness shall benefit all who have been truthful.

This is God's word at the end of that interrogation beheld by all creatures. It is the final and decisive word. It is coupled with the reward that befits truthfulness and those who are truthful: Theirs shall be gardens through which running waters flow, where they will abide forever. God is well pleased with them, and they are well pleased with Him. (5:119) Each of these phrases represents a grade above the previous one: the gardens with running waters, the everlasting abode there, the fact that God is pleased with them, and their pleasure with what they receive from Him. Hence the description, That is the supreme triumph. (5:119)

We have looked at this scene as it is portrayed in the unique style of the Quran and we have paid attention to the final word. We say that we have seen and paid attention because the Quranic method of portraying scenes and images does not leave it as merely a promise to be fulfilled or sentences and phrases to be read or heard. The Quran makes of it something to excite feelings and something to behold as if it were taking place now. However, if it is, as far as we human beings are concerned, a future event to be witnessed on the Day of Judgment, it is, for God's perfect knowledge, a present reality. Time and the screen of the future apply to us, not to God.

At the end of this passage and in contrast to the greatest falsehood ever perpetrated by the followers of any messenger, i.e. the falsehood of Christ's Divine nature, which he himself denounces and leaves all decision about which to God alone, a statement of truth is made. It provides the final note in the surah, declaring that dominion over the heavens and the earth and all that they contain belongs to God, the Lord of the universe who has full control over all things. Nothing limits His power: To God belongs all sovereignty over the heavens and the earth and all they contain. He has the power over all things. (5:120)

The Messiah is Not the Son of God

Chapter 9: The 113th Chapter Revealed

And the Jews said: Uzayr is the son of God
and the Christians said:
The Messiah is the son of God.
That is the saying with their mouths.
They conform to the sayings of those who were ungrateful before.
May God take the offensive. How they are mislead! (9:30)
They have taken to themselves their learned Jewish scholars
and their monks as lords other than God
and the Messiah son of Mary.
And they were only commanded to worship the One God.
There is no god but He!
Glory be to H
from the partners they ascribe with Him. (9:31)

The Companions of the Cave

Chapter 18: The 69th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *We relate this tiding to **you** with The Truth.*
Truly, they were male spiritual warriors
who believed in their Lord
and We increased them in guidance. (18:13)
And We invigorated their hearts when they stood up and said:
Our Lord is Lord of the heavens and the earth.
We will never call to any god other than He.
Certainly, we would have said an outrageous thing. (18:14)
These, our folk, took to themselves gods other than Him.
Why bring they not a clear portent of authority with them?
And who does greater wrong
than he who devised a lie against God? (18:15)
And when you withdrew from them and from what
they worship but God, then, take shelter in the cave.
Your Lord will unfold for you from His mercy
and will furnish you with a gentle issue in your affair. (18:16)
Thou wouldst have seen the sun when it came up.
It inclines from their cave towards the right
and when it began to set, it passed them towards the left
while they were in a fissure. That is of the signs of God.
He whom God guides, he is one who is truly guided.
And he whom He causes to go astray,
you will never find for him a protector
or one who will show him the way. (18:17)

Commentary°

This sums up the whole story showing its main lines and features. We learn from it that the people of the cave were youths, whose number is not mentioned, and that they went to the cave to isolate themselves from their community because they believed in God. We also learn that they were made to sleep in the cave for a number of years, which is not stated here, before they were aroused from their long slumber. We are told of two groups arguing about them, so they were awakened to make clear which of the two groups calculated their stay in the cave better. We are clearly told that, strange as their history is, it is not particularly marvellous among the miracles and signs given by God. Indeed there are numerous things that are much more marvellous and miraculous in the universe than the story of the cave people. Those youths are referred to in the chapter as 'the people

of the cave and the inscription'. A cave is a natural chamber in a mountain or under rocky ground, while the inscription refers, most probably, to the record of their names which was, perhaps, the one hung at the entrance of the cave, where they were eventually found.

The Companions of the Cave

Makkah: *Thou would assume them to be awake*
while they are ones who are sleeping.
We turn them around and around towards the right
and towards the left and their dog,
one who stretches out its paws at the threshold.
And if you were to peruse them,
you would have turned from them, running away,
and would, certainly, be filled with alarm of them. (18:18)
And, thus, it was that We raised them up
that they might demand of one another.
Said one who speaks among them:
How long lingered you in expectation?
They said: We lingered in expectation a day or a part of a day.
They said: Your Lord is greater in knowledge
of how long you lingered in expectation.
So raise up one of you and with this, your money,
send him to the city and let him look on which is the purest food.
Then, let him bring you provision from there.
And let him be courteous and cause not anyone to realize. (18:19)
Truly, if you become manifest to them,
they will stone you, or they will cause you to return to their creed
and you would not ever prosper. (18:20)
And, thus, We made their case known
that they know that the promise of God is true
and that, as for the Hour, there is no doubt about it.
Mention when they contend with one another about their affair.
They said: Build over them a structure.
Their Lord is greater in knowledge about them.
Those who prevailed over their affair said:
We, certainly, will take to ourselves over them
a place of prostration. (18:21)
They will say: They were three, the fourth of them being their dog.
And they will say: They were five,
the sixth of them being their dog,
guessing at the unseen. And they will say:
They were seven, the eighth of them being their dog.
Say: My Lord is greater in knowledge of their amount.

No one knows them but a few,
so altercate not about them but with a manifest argumentation
and ask not for advice about them of anyone of them. (18:22)

COMMENTARY°

With all that has been said and told, we have still not been informed of the duration of the sleepers' stay in their cave. Now we are told for certain: (18:25-18:26)

This is the truth of the length of their stay in the cave, given to us by the One who knows all secrets in the heavens and the earth. Well indeed He sees and hears. Perfect is His knowledge. His statement puts an end to the matter, leaving no room for dispute.

A final comment is added about the whole story in which we see faith in God's Oneness clearly apparent in all its details: (18:26)

The Companions of the Town

Messengers Before Referred to and How They Were Denied

Chapter 36: The 41st Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And propound a parable for them:*
The Companions of the Town
when ones who were sent drew near them. (36:13)
When We sent to them two, they denied them both,
so We replenished them with the third.
And they said: Truly, We are ones who are sent to you. (36:14)
They said: You are nothing but mortals
like ourselves and The Merciful caused not to descend anything.
You are but lying! (36:15)
They said: Our Lord knows
that we are ones who are sent to you. (36:16)
On us is only the delivering of the clear message. (36:17)
They said: Truly, we augered ill of you.
If you refrain not yourselves, we will, certainly, stone you.
Certainly, a painful punishment will afflict you from us. (36:18)
They said: Ones who auger ill will be with you!
Is it because you were reminded?
Nay! You are a folk, ones who are excessive. (36:19)
A man drew near from the farther part of the city,
coming eagerly. He said: O my folk!
Follow the ones who are sent! (36:20)
Follow whoever asks not of you any compensation
and they are ones who are truly guided. (36:21)
What is it for me that I worship not Him
Who originated me and to Whom you will be returned? (36:22)
Will I take gods to myself other than He
when, if The Merciful wants any harm for me,
their intercession will not avail me at all
nor will they save me. (36:23)
Truly, I would, then, be clearly going astray.(36:24)
Truly, I believed in your Lord so hear me! (36:25)
It was said: Enter the Garden.
He said: O would that my folk know (36:26)
that my Lord forgave me
and made me one who is honored! (36:27)
After him We caused not to descend on his folk
an army from heaven, nor had We been

ones who need to cause to descend again.(36:28)
It would be but one Cry and that is
when they were ones who are silent and still. (36:29)

Commentary°

A Historical Case

Having presented the issues of revelation and resurrection in the form of a factual statement, the chapter now presents them again in narrative form so as to touch hearts with a story about the fate of those who persist in denying the truth: (36:13-36:19)

The Quran does not mention which township this was or who were its people. Different reports suggest different towns and cities, but there is no real benefit in trying to establish its identity. The fact that the Quran neither identifies it nor mentions its location does not detract from the import of the story. It is a city to which God sent two messengers, just as He sent Moses and his brother Aaron to Pharaoh and his nobles. The people of the city rejected their message, accusing them of lying. God supported His two messengers with a third, confirming that they were truly His messengers. All three of them again presented their message, saying to the people: (36:14)

At this point, the people of the city aired the same objections that were given to God's messengers throughout history: (36:15) This oft-repeated objection to the fact that God sends human messengers to human communities betrays a naive understanding and ignorance of the nature of the messenger's role. People expected that both the personality and the life of the messenger should entail some deep secret which could feed their imaginations. In other words, they expected the unusual in such a way as attracted legend. Was he not a messenger sent from the heavens to the earth? How come, then, that he is just a simple ordinary person with no puzzling secrets surrounding him? He is no different from anyone else, no different from the multitude to be found everywhere.

Such thinking is certainly naive. Secrets and enigmas are not essential qualities for prophethood and divine messages; not in this childish way of thinking. There is indeed a great secret involved, but it is epitomized in the plain fact that an ordinary person is given the ability to receive revelations from on high once God has chosen him for that task.

The divine message is a code of living for a human community. The messenger's life represents a practical example of how this code is implemented. It is given as a model for people to follow. Since they are human, the messenger showing them this example must be human like them so that he sets the sort of example they can emu-

late.

Therefore, the Prophet's life was held open before his followers. The Quran records the main features of his life in their minute detail, so as to make it clear and available for future generations. These details include aspects of his home and personal life, and even, at times, his thoughts and feelings. In this way, even future generations would recognize the man behind the Prophet's personality.

Yet it was this simple and clear fact that invited people's objections. In this chapter, those who lived in the city said to their three messengers: (36:15) which meant that they were not truly messengers from God. They also said: (36:16) of what you claim. They further added: (36:15) when you claim to be messengers from God.

Certain that they said nothing but the truth, and knowing the remit of the mission assigned to them, the messengers replied: (36:16-36:17) It is sufficient that God knows. The task assigned to God's messengers is to deliver their message, and they did just that. People are then free to choose what they wish for themselves, and what burden their choices represent. Once the messengers have delivered their message, the matter is left to God to determine.

However, those who persist in denying the truth do not take matters in such a simple and easy way. They cannot tolerate the advocates of faith's presence. They resort to rough tactics in rejecting sound argument. The point is that falsehood is impatient, aggressive: . (36:18) We view your call with gloom, expecting it to bring evi' upon us. Unless you stop, we will no longer tolerate you: 'we wil surely stone you and inflict on you a painful suffering.' Thus falsehood declares its intentions, threatening those advocating divine guidance and resorting to heavy handed tactics in answering the quiet word of truth.

However, the task assigned to God's messengers requires them to proceed along their way: (36:19) Forebodings of evil as a result of a message being delivered or a face being encountered is nothing but ignorant superstition. The messengers tell them so, and make clear to them that their share of good or evil comes from within themselves. In other words it relates to their actions and intentions. It is up to them to increase their share of goodness or evil. What God wills for people comes from within themselves and from their own choices and actions. This is the truth based on a firm foundation. To associate bad omens with faces, places or words is superstitious nonsense.

The Messengers also said to them: (36:19) Would you stone us and torture us only because we remind you of the truth? Is this how you reward reminders? (36:19) You certainly exceed the limits of judgment if you reward a mere reminder with threats and punish-

ment, and requite advocacy of the truth with stoning and torture.

Welcome Support

Such was the response of hearts that would not open to God's message. It is such people that were mentioned at the outset of the chapter. The other type, who follow the reminder and fear God despite their inability to see Him, also have here a behavioral example to emulate: (36:20-36:25)

This is the response of sound human nature to the straightforward message of the truth: it reflects sincerity, simplicity, warmth and correct understanding. It shows us a man giving a positive response to the message, once he has recognized the elements of truth and sound logic in it. He points out these elements to his people as he addresses them. When he felt the truth of faith in his heart, he could not stay quiet or sit at home caring nothing while the truth was being rebuffed and falsehood upheld all around him. Instead he actively advocated the truth among his people, among those who were threatening the messengers with severe punishment. He travelled from the furthest end of the city to fulfil his duty, to call on his people to espouse the truth and to stop their opposition to it and aggression against God's messengers.

It is apparent that the man did not command a position of honor, power or influence among his people. He was an ordinary person motivated by faith to travel from one end of the city to the other to make his stand clear. (36:20-36:21) Anyone who advocates such a message, seeking no gain or reward, must be honest and sincere. What else could motivate him to undertake such trouble, enduring such opposition, unless he was required to do so by God? Why would he bear such a burden, confronting people with a faith that is unfamiliar to them, exposing himself in the process to threats, ridicule and persecution when he stood to make no gain nor earn any benefit?

Follow whoever asks not of you any compensation and they are ones who are truly guided. (36: 21) That they are guided aright is obvious: they advocate belief in the One God, following a clear system, and a faith that is free of ambiguity and superstition. Their way is clearly straight.

The man then speaks about himself, outlining the reasons that motivated him to believe, and appealing to sound human nature: (36:22-36:24) The question is posed by sound human nature which feels the presence of its Creator and the source of its existence: *What is it for me that I worship not Him Who originated me and to Whom you will be returned?* Why would I deviate from this natural way

which is the first to present itself to human nature? Needless to say, we are by nature attracted to our Creator and only deviates from Him under the pressure of some outside element. To turn to the Creator is the right and appropriate course, requiring no alien element or a pull from outside.

The man also feels by nature that a created being must in the end return to its Creator, in the same natural law that brings everything horning to its originator: *To Whom you will be returned* He wonders why he should not worship his Creator when he is bound to return to Him, as will we all. It is He who creates, and it is He who should he worshipped.

The man then looks at the opposite way, which is contrary to sound nature, only to find that it is nothing but manifest error: (36:23) Can anyone be in greater error than the one who abandons the way of sound nature which requires that a created being worship its Creator? Why would anyone choose to worship someone or something else unnecessarily? Indeed, the one who turns his back on the Creator, resorting instead to weak deities that cannot protect him, has gone far into error: *Truly, I would, then, be clearly going astray.* (36:24)

Now that the man has stated his case, speaking for sound human nature that is aware of the truth, he declares his own final decisio confronting his people who had threatened God's Messengers. T voice of sound nature in his heart was clearer and stronger than an threat: *Truly, I believed in your Lord so hear me!* (36:25) He wants them to witness his stand on the side of truth, implying that they too should follow his suit and declare themselves believers.

Killing an Innocent Man

The drift of the story suggests that the ungrateful then killed the man. The chapter, however, does not mention this clearly. Instead, it lets the curtain drop to cover this city, its people and their preoccupations. When the curtain rises again we see the martyr who spoke out clearly and loudly for the truth, confronting those in power. We see him in the next world and see the honor granted him by God, as fits a brave believer who does not hesitate to stand up for the truth: (36:26-36:27)

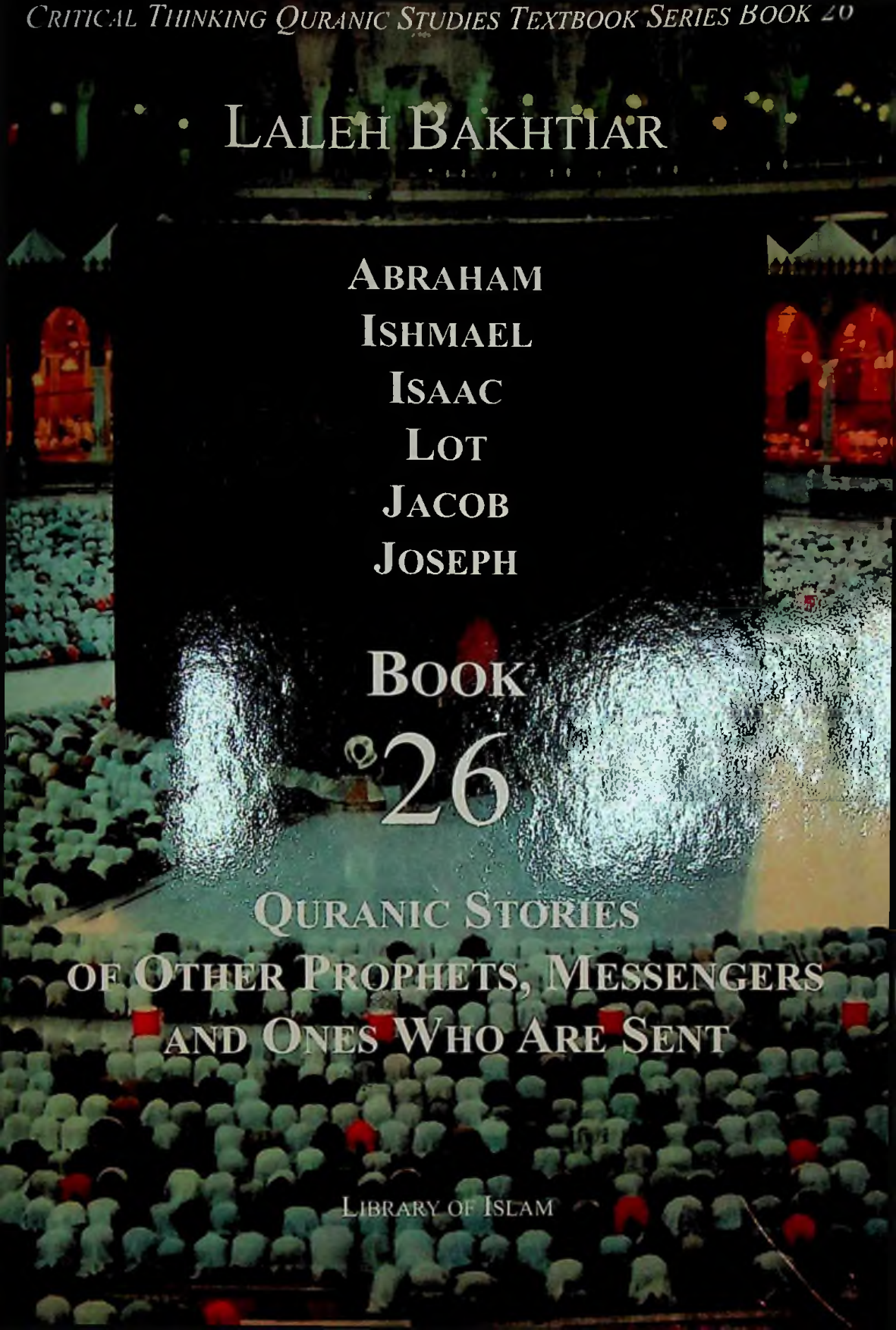
Thus this present life is connected to the life to come: Death is merely a transfer from this transitory world to the one that is everlasting. It is but a step that takes a believer from the narrowness of the earth to the expanse of heavens, from the tyranny of falsehood to the security of the truth, and from the darkness of ignorance to the light of certainty. When a person sees what God has in store for him

in heaven, he good-naturedly remembers his people, wishing that they could see the happiness and honor God has granted him so that they would know and accept the truth.

Such is the reward of faith. As for tyranny, it is too weak to require that God should send angels to destroy it: (36:28-36:29) The chapter does not speak in detail about how these people were destroyed. They are too insignificant to deserve such mention. They needed no more than one blast and no further trace of life was to be seen from them.

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Preface

Explanation of the Critical Thinking Quranic Studies Textbook Series

There are thirty books in this series. Books entitled *Book Year 1* to *Book Year 24* consist of one book for each year of the revelation. Books 25-28 are devoted to the Quranic stories of all other Prophets and Messengers in order of their dates. *Book 25: Adam, Cain and Abel, Enoch (Idris), Noah, Hud and the People of Aad; Saleh and the People of Thamud; Book 26: Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob (Israel), Joseph and Job; Book 27: Moses, Aaron, Children of Jacob* (known as Israel), *Jethro (Shuayb), Joshua, Khidr and Samuel; Book 28: David, Solomon, Elijah (Ilyas), Elisha (Alyasa), Jonah (Younis), Ezekiel (Dhul Kifl), Ezra (Uzayr), Dhul Qarnayn (Cyrus the Great or Alexander the Great), Luqman, Zechariah, John the Baptist (Yahya), Mary and Jesus.* The last two are: *Book 29: The Life of Prophet Muhammad from Birth to the Revelation* and *Book 30: Teacher's Manual.* The last, *Book 30,* has been prepared for the teacher's Lesson Plans.

Sources

The sources for the history include the works of Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Hashim, Waqidi, Ibn Sad and commentaries by Ibn Abbas, Jalalayn, Tustari and Sayyid Qutb. The sources for the commentaries of Ibn Abbas, Jalalayn and Tustari have been used with the permission of the publisher, the Royal Institute of Ahl al-Bayt in Jordan. They are available on their website www.altafsir.com.

The inclusion of excerpted commentaries (tafsir) by Sayyid Qutb's In the Shade of the Quran (available online) in this Critical Thinking Quranic Studies Textbook Series is because Sayyid Qutb is considered by some extremist groups as their intellectual source. By including excerpts from his eighteen volume Quranic commentary, extremists cannot disclaim the importance of learning critical thinking as this series is to help young adults learn HOW to think using self-realization (tahqiq) and critical thinking (furqan) skills taught by the Quran. This in order to arm young adults with the ability to choose reason over any irrational extremist ideology that is presented to them.

Terminology

All Quranic signs are translations from *The Sublime Quran.* For the Muslim, the Quran is the Word (Logos) of God. It is this Word of God that has inspired artists, artisans, poets, philosophers and writers, those who had been the exponents of Islamic culture and civilization for almost 1500 years. Yesterday and today's Muslim wants to know more about each Word that God chose for His revelation through the Quran. This realization, in turn, prompted the translation of The Sublime Quran, an attempt to give the sense of unity within the revelation to a non-Arabic speaking reader.

There are several points to note about the terminology used in the translation of the Quranic text and the commentaries.

1. The blessed Prophet did not bring a new religion; he came to confirm what was right in the messages of the previous Prophets. Does this translation speak to the universality of the Quran? The Quran tells the Prophet, the mercy to all of humanity, to speak to people in their own language. Following his example, in addition to the translation being unbounded by time, in several sensitive cases, the word chosen to translate an Arabic word is also of a universal or inclusive rather than a particular or exclusive nature. This adds to the broadening of the perspective and scope of the Quran so that it becomes inclusive rather than exclusive to one particular group of people. In other words, in this way a larger audience can relate to its message.

2. The Quran refers to itself (the Quran) from the very beginning of the revelation (68:35).

3 Most English translations of the Quran refer to the "Children of Israel." The word "Israel" when used in the Quran refers to Jacob, the patriarch of the children who followed him such as Joseph. Therefore, it should be the "Children of Jacob" as it appears in these texts.

5. The word "*kufr*" and "*kafir*" have been translated here as "ingratitude" and "ungrateful" where the context allows. This is the first meaning of the word and many of us in our lifetime have met Muslims who are "ungrateful." It is the ungrateful Muslims who practice intolerance by declaring anyone who says: Peace be upon you (as-salam alaykum) as a non-believer (with what is called *takfir*). In those cases, it would not be suitable to call them "unbelievers" or "infidels," but it is clearly appropriate to refer to them as being "ungrateful" and this would include the early Quraysh, ungrateful for God's revelation and prophethood of Muhammad, who ridiculed the Prophet and fought against the Quranic message of love, forgiveness and peace.

6. Yet another example of the use of inclusive language in an attempt to speak to people in their own language, is the use of God instead of Allah. Many English speaking Muslims, as well as many of the English translations of the Quran to date, use Allah when speaking English instead of God. The intention on the part of the speaker is to maintain a sense of piety. They feel that using Allah in English moves them in that direction. Many even claim that the word Allah cannot be translated.

However well-intentioned a person may be, when speaking English, the use of the word Allah instead of God, first of all, does not follow the Quranic verse that tells the Prophet to speak to people in their own language. Subsequently, it does not follow the Sunnah of the Prophet who did speak to people in their own language.

In addition, it creates a divide between Muslims who use the word and the English speaking people of various faiths to whom they are speaking. In

effect, it creates the illusion that there is more than One God—Allah and God. The response of the English speaking person of another faith is to say: I do not understand your religion; you have a different God than I do and you call Him Allah.

It needs to be clearly explained to English speaking Muslims that, unlike what they may feel, they do not have a monopoly on the word Allah. Arabic speaking Christians and Arabic speaking Jews also refer to God as Allah. The Old Testament and New Testament, when translated into Arabic, use Allah for God.

English speaking Muslims, therefore, need to recall the message of the Quran that God is One (tawhid). In addition, the Prophet did not bring a new religion but confirmed what was correct in the messages of previous Prophets, namely, that God is One. Finally, they need to follow the example of the Prophet, as the Quran says he is the model or example to be followed, by speaking to people in their own language.

7. The Arabic language, much like old English, has the second person singular (masculine: anta (where the verb ends in ka). The English equivalent is the subject: "thou" or the object: "thee" or the possessive: "thy." As these are no longer in common usage in English, wherever the original Arabic uses one of these terms, the word "**you**" or "**your**" appear in bold font so that the reader knows the original was the second person singular. When the Quran is speaking directly to the Prophet, it uses the pronoun "thee" or "thou" so it is an important distinction to make.

Using you (second person plural) is done to help English speaking readers, recognizing that using the second person plural pronoun you (masculine: antum where the verb ends in masculine: kum) for God is to intimate that God is plural, the only sin in the Quran that is unforgivable. By putting the pronoun **you** in bold font indicates the true intention.

8. For the Arabic word "*ayah*," the English word used in these texts is "sign" rather than the Biblical term, "verse."

9. Several of the signs were abrogated over time. However the indication of a sign being abrogated was done after the complete revelation of the Quran. Whether or not a sign was later abrogated does not change the fact that the first Muslims who listened to the Quran, heard the signs that may have later been said to have been abrogated and that a hafez of the Quran recites all the signs as they appear in the original Arabic revealed to the Prophet. Whatever signs scholars later determined to be abrogated are still part of the Quran and, therefore, are not relevant to learning to be a Quranic critical thinker, learning HOW to think.

10. The first number that appears when the Quranic Chapters begin refers to the chapter number in the chronological order of the revelation so that Quranic Chapter 110 which was the last to be revealed is number 114 in the chronological order.

11. It is to be noted that whenever the name of Muhammad, Prophet Muhammad or the Prophet are used, one may say a silent prayer of blessings for him.

12. All the signs in the text are in chronological order.

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Introduction

1: The Islamic School of Thought and Action
2: Prophet Abraham's School of Thought and Action
3: Prophet Abraham's Perception of the World and Response

In this Introduction, we explore the school of thought of Prophet Abraham and how that school was continued by Prophets, Messengers and Ones Who Are Sent from Abraham to Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob and Joseph and eventually to Prophet Muhammad (*Books Year 1* to *Book Year 24*).

We begin with the Islamic School of Thought and Action followed by exploring: The Followers of the Islamic Movement; Islamic Perception of the Universe; and the Islamic Response and Summary.

1: The Islamic School of Thought and Action

A school of thought and action is the name given to the doctrines held in common by a group of people. It is a neutral term used without any further evaluation of a particular schools' position on an issue. It refers to an orientation or guideline which may be negative or positive. There are many schools of thought in the world, some of which have no apparent or specific religious orientation—like materialism, skepticism, existentialism—while others have a specific religious orientation like monotheism, polytheism, infidelity or ingratitude, Buddhism, Hinduism, or Taoism.

Every school of thought and action is based on a perception of the universe or what is known as cause and a response to that perception or what is known as effect. These two, in turn, develop a perspective/response to history, society, and the individual. This will become more clear as you move through the introduction. Also, every school of thought marks out its followers in a particular way, emphasizing some aspect of the human being in question. Some schools attract followers of race theory according to which only the members of a certain race are accepted. Other schools attract followers of a certain class.

The Followers of the Islamic Movement

Islam is universal in the sense that its followers do not belong to any one class, race, occupation, region, or any other division. The fol-

lowers of the school of thought and action of Islam are not just Arabs or just non-Arabs, nor Black or white, nor rich or poor, nor Easterners or Westerners, nor Asian or African, nor males or females. They are people who come together because of unity or sameness in perception of the universe and response. The basis of the summons of this school of thought and action is the relationship between the human being—all human beings—and God just as the name suggests—submission to the will of God (*islam*).

Islamic Perception of the Universe

The Islamic perspective is based in and permeated by the belief that God is One and that there is no deity but God. According to this perception, this is the most natural disposition that an individual can have and one with which the human being is naturally endowed but it is lost sight of through the nurturing process. All of the Prophets were sent to confirm this position including Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, the latter of whom is considered to be the Seal and the last of the Prophets.

The Islamic Response

Response to this perception in the Islamic movement is twofold: first, defending its goals by commanding to the good or counseling to the positive and second, overcoming the goals of the opposition to the belief in the One God by preventing evil or preventing the development of the negative.

Defending the goals of the Islamic movement by a response to counseling to the positive takes several forms. These forms operate on two types of relationships: first, the relationship of the individual to the One God; and second, the relationship between the individual and society. Responses of the first type include prayer, both ritual prayer (*salat*) and supplication, paying the poor-due, pilgrimage to Makkah, fasting during the month of Ramadan and counseling the self to the positive and trying to prevent the development of the negative. The second type includes responses to social and political affairs like marriage, divorce, the regulation of contracts, legal punishments, and counseling others to the positive and trying to prevent the development of the negative. In general, these responses, when done with the right intention, have a positive effect upon the individual and the community.

The response to overcoming the goals of the opposition to the belief

that God is One include methods that are to prevent the development of the negative. These include migration and *jihad*. *Jihad* is a response that has two forms: outer against the opposition which is the lesser *jihad* and inner within the self against negative influences and this is called the greater *jihad*.

In trying to overcome the goals of the opposition to the belief in the One God, the Islamic movement has historically also stood against other religious schools like that of ingratitude or infidelity to the One God (*kufr*), hypocrisy (*nifaq*), and arrogance (*istikbar*), the latter of which results in one who rebel's against God's commands (*taghut*).

In the history of Islam, Prophet Abraham stands against infidelity and its subcategory of idolatry. Prophet Moses opposes the self-worshipping Pharaoh who is a person who rebels against God's commands (*taghut*). Prophet Jesus stands against the hypocrisy of the rabbis of his time and the Roman idol-worshipping, rebels against God's commands (*taghut*s). Prophet Muhammad stands against ingratitude to the One God (*kufr* or covering over the truth) and its subcategory of worshipping more gods than there are (*shirk*). He confronts the arrogant Quraysh, even though they are members of his own family and tribe who rebel against God's commands and worship idols. Once hypocrisy develops in Madinah, he confronts it whether among Muslims or the People of the Book.

Summary

We have seen the perception/response of the Islamic movement as manifested by Prophet Abraham which is continued by Prophet Muhammad. This is the movement of monotheism (*tawhid*) in history. We have also had a glimpse of the perception/response of the movement which opposes the Islamic movement by practicing ingratitude to the One God (*kufr*). In either case, the perception/response of a movement motivates its views of history, society, and the human being.

2: Prophet Abraham's School of Thought and Action

The strategy used by Prophet Abraham and Prophet Muhammad, as examples of all Prophets and Messengers, namely, "Say: 'God is One,' and be saved," shows their unity of purpose. Many of their tactics are also similar because the latter is the confirmation and continuation of the other. It is revealed to both of them to call the people to the worship of One God through formal prayer. The monotheistic response to

God's actions in the creation, then, is prayer and giving thanks. In addition, both of these Prophets are commanded by God to call people to the pilgrimage, to the House of the One God, to worship One God together.

After Prophet Abraham and his son, Prophet Ishmael, call the people to the pilgrimage and the worship of the One God, the people become negligent and forgetful. Their natural instinct to worship the One God becomes covered over with doubts. These doubts are placed in their minds in one of three possible ways: first, by a despotic ruler who forces them to worship him or something he has ordered to be carved. Second, by corrupt religious scholars who either allow their judgments to be based on the rulers' self-interests or they themselves are interested in ruling. Third, by the forces of wealth and power who want to hold the people in obligation to them in order to increase their own wealth and power instead of allowing them to show their thankfulness for their blessings to the One God.

It is these forces which Prophet Abraham stands against and confronts as does Prophet Muhammad later. It is these forces that persecute and torture both Prophet Abraham and Prophet Muhammad. In the case of Prophet Muhammad, the persecution and torture extend to his Companions, *sahabah*, as well.

Both of these two great people in history are forced to migrate when the oppression against them grows to be more than a human being can bear. With great courage and wisdom, they give the message of the One God to the people. Their message embraces everyone because every human being has the right to know the way to salvation. Accepting it or rejecting it is their own decision, but at least they will not be able to claim ignorance of the message on the Day of Judgment.

Thus their school of thought and action is the same, namely, submission to the Will of the One God (*islam*). Their perception of the world is the same, namely: the world has one Creator Who will summon everyone back to Him at the time of the End, the Day of Judgment, where each will have to give an account of their deeds. This sameness of perception motivates them and leads to sameness in response towards the opposition they face, namely, to confront disbelief, ingratitude, covering over the truth (*kufr*), worship of other than the One God (*shirk*), and hypocrisy (*nifaq*) with the Word of God: "Say: 'God is One,' and be saved."

The differences in tactics the Prophet Muhammad uses are in re-

sponse to situations which do not exist at the time of Prophet Abraham and because Prophet Muhammad is given an additional role to play, namely, that of the Seal of Prophets. There will be no Prophet after him. Therefore he has the task of perfecting and completing God's Message for all time. In order to be able to do this, the Quran teaches him to form the Community (*ummah*). Members of this Community are given the task of carrying on the message just as they had received it from the Messenger in the form of the Quran and how he understood and practiced it that became the *sunnah*. Whereas Prophet Abraham himself is referred to as a Community in the Quran, Prophet Muhammad's Community forms out of his Companions who he himself trains and for whom he is the model.

This responsibility has been carried out to different degrees by the Community for over 1400 years. It has been possible because the revelation, the eternal Word of God had been written down by scribes during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad. It is preserved today in the Arabic language just as it had been received by him. That, together with his actions and sayings, and approvals, called the *sunnah*, have preserved the model ethics and behavior. The Quran and the *sunnah* are the models for both the Community and each individual member of the Community. The success and/or failure of the Community depends upon the success and/or failure of each individual. In the Islamic perspective, each individual is responsible to follow these models to the best of his or her ability, remembering, "*There is no compulsion in religion*," (2:256) and:

> **Madinah:** *God places not a burden*
> *on a soul beyond its capacity.*
> *For it is what it earned and against it is what it deserved.*
> *Our Lord! Take us not to task if we forgot or made a mistake.*
> *Our Lord! Burden us not with a severe test*
> *like that which* ***You*** *had burdened those who were before us.*
> *Our Lord! Load us not such that we have no energy for it*
> *and pardon us and forgive us and have mercy on us.*
> ***You*** *are our Defender so help us against the folk,*
> *the ones who are ungrateful.* (2:286)

According to the Quran, the Book of Abraham had contained what the monotheist who submits to the will of God is told about the school of monotheism:

Makkah : *The burdened soul will not bear*
the heavy load of another. (53:38)
The human being is not but what he endeavored for (53:39)
and that his endeavoring will be seen. (53:40)
Again, he will be given recompense for it
with a more true recompense, (53:41)
and that towards ***your*** *Lord is the Utmost Boundary,* (53:42)
and that He caused laughter and caused weeping, (53:43)
and that He caused to die and gave life (53:44)
and it is He, He created the pairs, the male and the female (53:45)
from seminal fluid when it is emitted, (53:46)
and that with Him is another growth (53:47)
and it is He, He Who Enriched and made rich (53:48)
and that He, He is the Lord of Sirius. (53:49)

In these signs, the Quran points out ethical truths that Prophet Abraham is entrusted to convey. They are:

1. Individual responsibility: This responsibility is general both in terms of faith and action. This means it is the choice of each individual to choose or not to choose to follow God's Way. No one is responsible for the misdeeds of another. This ethical truth appears in other verses of the Quran as well:

Makkah: *Say: Is it other than God that I should desire as a lord*
while He is Lord of everything?
And each soul will earn only for itself.
No burdened soul will bear another's heavy load.
Again, to your Lord will you return.
Then, He will tell you
about what you had been at variance in it. (6:164)

Makkah: *And no burdened soul will bear another's load.*
If one who is weighed down calls for help for his heavy load,
nothing of it is carried for him,
even if he had been possessor of kinship.
Have ***you*** *warned only those who dread their Lord in the unseen*
and performed the formal prayer.
And he who purified himself, then,
only purifies for himself.
And to God is the Homecoming. (35:18)

Makkah: *If you are ungrateful, truly,*

God is Independent of you.
And He is not well-pleased with ingratitude from His servants.
And if you give thanks,
He will be well-pleased with you.
No burdened soul will bear the heavy load of another.
Again, to your Lord is the return,
so He will tell you what you had been doing.
Truly, He is Knowing of what is in the breasts. (39:7)

Two other concepts or ideas are implied in this first point in the Quran. First, the sign clearly shows that there is no concept of original sin. Second, that no one can pay for or is responsible for the sins of another.

2. The human being must strive and work hard or he/she will gain nothing.

3. If the human being strives hard, however, the results will soon come in sight and the person will find his/her Abraham's school of thought and action in the Quran, we are told that Prophet Abraham should be followed as a model because: first of all, he is devotedly obedient to God; secondly, he is a monotheist (*hanif*); and thirdly, he does not join gods with God, that is, he does not practice ingratitude to the One God in any form, but particularly that of idolatry as is practiced by people in his time.

Makkah: *Abraham had been a community obedient to God*
—a monotheist—
he is not among the ones who are polytheists. (16:120)
He was one who is thankful for His divine blessings.
He elected him and guided him to a straight path. (16:121)
And We gave him in the present benevolence.
And, truly, in the world to come he will be among
the ones in accord with morality. (16:122)
Again, we revealed to ***you***
that ***you*** *follow the creed of Abraham*
—a monotheist.
And he had not been among
the ones who are polytheists. (16:123)

We are told in the *sunnah* that Prophet Abraham is persecuted because he challenges the false beliefs of his people, migrates from his home and people in Babylon because of the persecution and then settles

in Canaan. The Quran repeats, saying to follow the religious tradition of Abraham

Madinah: *Say: God was Sincere,*
so follow the creed of Abraham
—a monotheist—
and not had he been among the ones who are polytheists. (3:95)
Truly, the first House set in place for humanity
was that which is at Bekka,
that which is blessed, and a guidance for the worlds. (3:96)
In it are clear portents, signs, the Station of Abraham.
And whoever entered it had been one who is safe.
And to God is a duty on humanity of pilgrimage
to the House in Makkah for whoever
was able to travel the way to it.
And whoever was ungrateful,
then truly God is Independent of the worlds. (3:97)

Idolatry refers to a movement or school of thought and action that is developed as a religious tradition by its followers to justify their superiority over others. Idolatry is prevalent in the Tigris-Euphrates valley where Prophet Abraham lives. There are the idols of Lagash, Nipur, Ur, and Babylonia. The largest house of idols in history is in Babylon and Prophet Abraham is the first person in history who rises to destroy this house and the tradition.

By rising against idolatry, Prophet Abraham does not just break a few stone idols which had become gods of a tribe. He challenges the idols of ignorance and arrogance, false knowledge and powers. The Prophet Abraham that Muslims know continues a movement which is always alive and humanity is continuously committed to strive to follow his way. Why? The reason Prophet Abraham continues to break the false religious system is because the false religious system tries to preserve multiple classes, racial discrimination, class discrimination, racial superiority, and class differences. He rises to liberate or save the humanity which, throughout history, has been victims of these discriminations.

3: Prophet Abraham's Perception of the World and His Response

Prophet Abraham's perception of the world develops from seeing and reflecting upon the power and the laws of the heavens and the earth

through which he attains certitude in his belief that God is One (see 6:75-82).

Prophet Abraham contrasts his monotheist's perception of the world with that of the tyrant (*taghut*) Nimrod (see 2:258). These two examples from the Quran show that Prophet Abraham confirms his belief in monotheism and that all power rests with God.

Prophet Abraham performs many great deeds. His story is the story of a man alone and unique who arises against history. It is the story of the movement of an individual whose only weapon is true faith and sincere thought and his only power is love of the Creator. He stands alone against the perception of the world held by other than the monotheist. When consciousness and love become allies, they break through and history fulfills its philosophy in the monotheistic perspective as the completion and perfection of the will of God.

Prophet Abraham's response to his perception are a lesson for history. The rest of the textbooks in this series show the Messenger's responses are the same because his perception of the universe is the same. The first lesson to be learned from Prophet Abraham's response is that the worship of the One God is innate or instinctive within human beings. While Prophet Muhammad is not recorded in the Quran nor in the *sunnah* to have had the same doubts that Prophet Abraham had, the Quran confirms that the worship of the One God is innate or instinctive (see 30:30).

Prophet Abraham grows up in a society that worships idols. His father, it is said, is an idol-carver. In spite of this, when Prophet Abraham reflects upon the universe, he is able to see things as they really are. His mind moves from considering worshipping idols to considering worshipping the moon and the sun and finally considering worshipping the One God. His beliefs evolve from the material to the spiritual and he realizes, through stages, that the worship of the One God is the highest stage. It is the stage of truth and reality and it arises from his most basic nature.

Secondly, when he struggles against the tyrant (*taghut*) Nimrod, based on his perception of the world, Prophet Abraham responds to a despotic ruler by counseling to the positive and trying to prevent the development of the negative (*amr bil maruf wa nahy an al-munkar*). Although Prophet Abraham is an example of one person acting alone and making a difference, Prophet Muhammad acted alone and with his Community of believers to counsel to good and try to prevent evil.

Even though each of them may have doubted that he could have an effect on the situation, each one still did his duty and left the results to God.

The Quran tells us that as a result of Prophet Abraham's doing his duty, the tyrant Nimrod surrounds Prophet Abraham with a fire. God then turns that fire into a bed of flowers. The lesson here is that even when one voice confronts the greatest of human powers, it can make a difference when it has sincerity and love for truth, for God is on its side.

A third lesson one learns about the movement of Prophet Abraham in history is that when the system of ingratitude to the One God becomes too great to bear, a person who submits to the will of the One God, migrates. Prophet Abraham is a man who throughout his long life, struggled against false systems which had brought oppression and discrimination to society by justifying through false religiosity. He struggles against idolatry in Ur in Babylon when it had reached its peak of power as well as against the course of history which had taken humanity along with itself. Then he goes to Hebron. He confronts the star-worshippers. From there he goes to Egypt and then returns to Palestine and continues his struggle there. He once again returns to Egypt and then again to the Tigris-Euphrates valleys and the Arabian peninsula. Then after the story of Hagar and the Kabah, he continuously moves between Palestine and Makkah. The migration of Prophet Muhammad to Madinah to escape the oppression of the Quraysh comes in the later chapters.

Neither Prophet hesitates in manifesting the spirit which seeks Truth (al-Haqq) and human struggle in believing in and practicing that Truth. They are, in a sense, in continuous migration, movement, and struggle against all of the manifestations of corruption, deceit, bullying, oppression, and hypocrisy until they die.

A fourth lesson to be learned from the movement of Prophet Abraham is that the victory of a mission, the victory of a truth, can be realized at a time when all prevailing conditions bear witness to its opposite. We shall see the same situation with Prophet Muhammad. Prophet Abraham goes every so often to visit Hagar and Ishmael. The well of Zamzam is found there. His wife, Hagar, is able to form the economic foundations of Makkah because of it. The water of the Zamzam well allows the movement that had begun there, to spread. Ishmael grows up God commands that His House, the House of God and

the People, be built in Makkah. It is he and Prophet Abraham who rebuilds the Kabah for the worship of the One God (22:26 in life). Prophet Ishmael continues the movement of monotheism begun by his father.

The building of this House is a monument to the first arising for truth, through thought and struggle, at a time when the course of history is passing through the most anguishing and deceitful era. The Kabah is a monument to the beginning of a great *jihad* or 'struggle' against deviation in human history. This House must be visited every year by every generation and circumambulated around by people in pilgrimage.

The fifth lesson Muslims learn of how to respond to their perception of the universe through the example of Prophet Abraham is that of prayer like his prayer with his son Ishmael (see 14:38-41). God says the same things about the Prophet of Islam (see 2:131, 6:161).

Prophet Abraham's movement, then, as revealed in the Quran teaches Muslims five responses to the monotheistic (*tawhidi*) perception of the universe. They are all an aspect of the worship of the One God. This worship may take the form of an individual standing against the greatest power on earth as Prophet Abraham did against the tyrant Nimrod by counseling to the positive and trying to prevent the development of the negative, leaving the results to God.

Worship may also take the form of migration when the forces of opposition become too strong and oppressive. Rather than submit to injustice and be killed, Prophet Abraham migrates. Pilgrimage to the House of God is yet another form the Muslims' response may take. The pilgrimage is the highest manifestation of individuals coming together in one place, without any discrimination whatsoever, to worship the One God. Finally, worship may take the form of prayer. Recognizing the power of prayer is an important lesson to be learned from the Islamic movement in history.

Abraham

The Scrolls of Abraham

Chapter 87: The 8th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *the scrolls of Abraham* ..... (87:19)

Commentary°

The sign points out that the message of Islam is not new; its roots go back far deep in time. The basics of the grand faith contained in this sign are the same old basic facts outlined in the ancient scriptures of Abraham and Moses.

Abraham Paid His Account in Full

Chapter 53: The 23rd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *and of Abraham*
who paid his account in full? (53:37)

Commentary°

This religion goes far back in history, and its latest version is closely related to its oldest one, with both having the same fundamental principles and values. Its different parts are mutually complementary, despite the fact that there have been many messages and Messengers, with wide gulfs separating them in time and place. It is embodied in the revelations given to Moses and to Abraham before him. Abraham is singled out here as having been true to his trust. He fulfilled every assignment given to him. This quality of Abraham's struggle is highlighted here to provide contrast with that of doing a little good first, then stopping altogether.

Abraham Described

Chapter 38: The 38th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And remember Our servants: Abraham,*
... imbued with dynamic energy and insight. (38:45)
And remember Our servants Abraham and Isaac and Jacob,
all imbued with strength and insight (38:46
And truly they are to Us
among ones who were favored and good. (38:47)

Commentary°

God, limitless is He in His glory, describes Abraham as a man *imbued with dynamic energy and insight*, which refers to his good actions, whether physical, done by hand, or mental, relying on sound

vision and good judgment. This implies that a person who does not do good deeds is without a hand, and the one who does nor think well is without a mind or a vision.

Abraham (87:19; 53:37) has insight into the foundations of his beliefs. He knows the evidence that he has and how he has come to believe. The evidence he has is that the truth is one and the faith is one (87:19). This results from the fact that their origin is one, God, whose will it was to send Messengers to humanity. The Messengers deliver basically the same message, the same simple truth. Details of the messages may differ according to local or temporal needs, but the basics are the same. They have one origin: God, the Most High, who creates, proportions well, determines and guides.

Abraham paid his account in full (53:37) This is a recognition by God of Abraham's faithful and complete fulfillment of those obligations, according him a very high rank in God's estimation and, therefore, God's promise that He appointed Abraham a leader. Thus, Abraham becomes the leader to be followed, the one who shows people the way to all goodness.

Abraham as a man of dynamic energy and insight had developed "intellectual humility" and was given a distinctive quality: the remembrance of the life to come. (38:45)

87:19: The truth is one and the faith is one. This results from the fact that their origin is one, God, whose will it was to send Messengers to humanity. The messengers deliver basically the same message, the same simple truth. Details of the messages may differ according to local or temporal needs, but the basics are the same. They have one origin: God, the Most High, who creates, proportions well, determines and guides.

Abraham Preaches Unity of God

Chapter 19: The 44th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And remember Abraham in the Book.*
Truly, he had been a just person, a Prophet. (19:41)
That is when he said to his father:
O my father! Why will ***you*** *worship what hears not,*
and perceives not,
and avails ***you*** *not anything?* (19:42)
O my father! Truly, I, there drew near me of the knowledge
of what approaches ***you*** *not.*
So follow me and I will guide ***you*** *to a path without fault.* (19:43)
O my father! Worship not Satan.
Truly, Satan had been rebellious towards The Merciful! (19:44)

*O my father! Truly, I fear that a punishment should afflict **you***
*from The Merciful so that **you** become*
a protector of Satan. (19:45)
*[Abraham's father] said: Are **you** one who shrinks from my gods,*
O Abraham?
*If **you** will not refrain **yourself**, certainly,*
*I will stone **you**, so abandon me for some while.* (19:46)
*He said: Peace be to **you**. I will ask for*
*forgiveness from my Lord for **you***
Truly, He had been One Who is Gracious to me. (19:47)
And I will withdraw from you
and what you call to other than God
and I will call to my Lord. Perhaps I will not be
disappointed in my supplication to my Lord. (19:48)
So he withdrew from them and what they worship other than God.
And We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob.
And each of them We made a Prophet. (19:49)

Commentary°

Abraham's moving away from his people, and how he was blessed with Ishmael and Isaac, all this comes in a chapter that portrays God's care for His chosen servants, generating a clearly felt ambience of love and compassion.

The [signs] now give an account of part of Abraham's story, demonstrating the singularity and fallacy of polytheistic beliefs. Abraham is the great ancestor from whom the Arabs claim to descend. In fact the pagan Arabs claimed the custodianship of the Kabah, built by Abraham and his son, Ishmael.

In this account, Abraham's contented, patient and gentle character is shown in sharp relief. We see these aspects of his character in his approach and language. They are also clearly apparent in his behavior and how he responds to his father's overbearing attitude. We also feel how God has bestowed His grace on Abraham, compensating him for his father and people, all ungrateful, with goodly offspring that beget a whole nation that has its generous share of Prophets and saintly persons. Yet these are followed by generations who neglected prayers and deviated from the path shown them by Abraham to pursue their desires. Those were the ungrateful.

God describes Abraham in the Quran as being '*a just person and a Prophet*'. The Arabic word, translated here as *a just person,* has a wider sense than merely being truthful. It connotes that he was always

truthful and a firm believer in the truth. Both qualities fit well with his character.

Abraham had developed confidence in reason while his father was still irrational. Critical thinkers as rational people "recognize the power of reason." He encourages his father to come to his own conclusions, but his father rejects his son's view and, as a typical tyrant, tries to compel Abraham to believe as he believes by arousing fear in Abraham, fear of being stoned if he continues. Abraham, confident in his ability to reason, rejects the "force and trickery as standard ways of changing another's mind." Abraham believes that "with proper encouragement and cultivation, [his father] can develop the ability to think for himself, to form reasonable points of view, to draw reasonable conclusions, and to think clearly and logically." Abraham tries to persuade his father by reason to become a reasonable person "despite the deep-seated obstacles in the native character of the human bind and in society as we know it." Abraham asks: Why do you worship that which hears not and perceives not and does not benefit you at all.

It is with such a passionate appeal that Abraham addresses his father, trying to guide him to the goodness God had taught him and to which He had directed him. His appeal is an endearing one, stressing his position as a loving son. He asks him why he worships something that cannot help him. (19:42) The normal practice is that people address their worship to someone who is more exalted, knowledgeable and stronger than the human being. Indeed worship is always presented to someone exalted above the human position. How is it, then, that in this case it is presented to something below the level of the human being, and indeed below the level of animals; something that does not hear or see anything and can cause no benefit or harm. This was the case of Abraham's father and community. They worshipped idols, just like the Arabs of the Quraysh who opposed Islam.

This is the first point in Abraham's appeal to his father. He follows it with a statement that he does not make this claim at his own behest. Rather, he makes it on the basis of true knowledge that has been vouchsafed to him by God to set him on the path of true guidance. He was certainly younger and less experienced than his father, but what had been bestowed on him from on high gave him a clear recognition of the truth. Hence he gives his advice to his father who had not received such knowledge. He wanted his father to follow suit so that he would be on the road of truth. (19:43)

There is nothing wrong with a father following his son when this son has a direct recourse to a higher source able to give true guidance. In this case, the son is the one who follows the right way, leading only to what is good.

Having shown his father the fallacy of idol worship and outlined the source of guidance he received, which is the cornerstone of his appeal to his father, Abraham makes it clear that the way followed by his father is that of Satan. His own aim is to guide his father to the way acceptable to God, the Most Merciful. He fears that his father may incur God's anger and thus become a close friend of Satan. (19:44-19:45)

It is Satan who tempts people to worship idols. This means that whoever worships idols is in the same position as one who worships the devil himself. Satan, it must not be forgotten, is a rebel who disobeys God in every way. Abraham warns his father against incurring God's displeasure. For if he does, he will become Satan's friend and follower and so liable to God's punishment. This shows clearly that when God guides a servant of His to obey Him, that in itself is a blessing, while befriending Satan is a scourge leading to God's punishment and a position of utter ruin on the Day of Judgment.

Insolent Answer to a Compassionate Appeal: Abraham's appeal, made in the most compassionate language, cannot however find its way to his father's hardened heart. The father retorts with rejection and threats. (19:46)

His father's answer was harsh, arrogant and threatening. He considered Abraham's rejection of idols to be impertinent. It was a crime for which Abraham deserved a cruel punishment: i.e. death by stoning. Hence, he advised him to stay away, or else punishment would be forthcoming.

It is with such ignorance and cruelty that the father replies to the son's passionate and polite appeal. No regard is given for the son's care and concern for his father. This is indeed the pattern of response that advocates of faith receive from those who are hardened by ingratitude and lack of guidance.

Abraham, however, does not allow anger to dictate his attitude. He does not lose sight of his dutifulness to his father. Hence, he continues to address him with respect and compassion. (19:47-19:48)

Abraham makes it clear that he will not respond to the threat, nor will he indulge in futile argument. He promises his father to pray to God to forgive him and not to punish him by allowing him to go further astray. He will pray to God to have mercy on his father and guide him to the truth. He tells him that he is used to God's generous favors, as He answers his prayers. Then he adds that if his own presence and appeal irritate his father, then he will withdraw, leave his father and people, abandoning the deities they invoke instead of God. He will only worship God alone, hoping that by doing so he will avoid being unblest. Such is a believer's politeness and humility. Abraham does not

feel that he is deserving of favors from God more than being spared misery, unhappiness and withdrawal of blessings.

Thus Abraham left his father, his community and homeland, as well as their idols and worship practices. God, however, blessed him with offspring and gave him what was better than that which he had sacrificed.

Abraham Advises his Father to Avoid Idolatry

Chapter 26: The 47th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And recount to them*
the tidings of Abraham (26:69)
when he said to his father and his folk:
What is it you worship? (26:70)
They said: We worship idols.
We will stay ones who give ourselves up to them. (26:71)
He said: Hear they when you call them? (26:72)
Or are they profiting you or hurting you? (26:73)
They said: Nay! But we found our fathers
acting likewise. (26:74)
He said: Then, considered what
you had been worshipping, (26:75)
you and your fathers, the elders? (26:76)
Truly, they are an enemy to me,
but not so the Lord of the worlds (26:77)
Who created me. And it is He Who guides me. (26:78)
And that He Who feeds me and gives me drink. (26:79)
And when I was sick, it is He Who heals me (26:80)
and Who causes me to die, again, will give me life, (26:81)
and from Whom I am desirous that
He will forgive me my transgressions
on the Day of Judgment. (26:82)
My Lord! Bestow on me critical judgment
and cause me to join
with the ones in accord with morality. (26:83)
And assign me a good name of good repute
with the later ones (26:84)
and make me one who inherits the Garden of Bliss. (26:85)
And forgive my father. Truly, he had been
among the ones who go astray. (26:86)
And cover me not with shame on a Day
they will be raised up, (26:87)
on a Day neither wealth will profit nor children (26:88)

but he who approached God with a pure-hearted heart. (26:89)
And the Garden will be brought close
for the ones who are God-conscious (26:90)
and hellfire will be advanced for the ones who are in error. (26:91)
And it will be said to them:
Where is what you had been worshipping (26:92)
instead of God? Are you helped by them?
Or help they themselves? (26:93)
Then, they were thrown down into it,
they and the ones who are in error, (26:94)
and the army of Iblis, one and all. (26:95)
And they said while they are in it striving
against one another: (26:96)
By God! Truly, we had been clearly wandering astray (26:97)
when we made you equal with the Lord of the worlds. (26:98)
And no one caused us to go astray but the ones who sin. (26:99)
Now we have not ones who are intercessors (26:100)
nor an ardent friend, a loyal friend. (26:101)
Would that there were for us a return again.
Then, we would be among the ones who believe! (26:102)
Truly, in this is a sign; yet most of them
had not been ones who believe. (26:103)
And, truly, your Lord, He is
The Almighty, The Compassionate. (26:104)

Commentary°

The chapter now moves on to tell us about Abraham and his people. The Prophet is ordered to relate this story to the ungrateful. For they claimed to be the custodians of Abraham's heritage in so far as they followed his old faith, even though they addressed their worship to multiple deities. Indeed, they went even further, placing idols in the Sacred Mosque built by Abraham as a focus for the followers of the pure faith based on God's oneness. The Prophet is required to tell them Abraham's story so that they know whether their claims are right or not. In this Chapter, historical accounts are not given in their chronological order, because it is only concerned with the lessons to be derived from these accounts.

The episode in Abraham's story given in this chapter concentrates on the message he delivered to his people, the debate he had with them, his denunciation of their alleged deities, addressing all worship to God alone and his reminder of the Day of Judgment. This is followed by a complete scene from the Day of Judgment when idolaters will deny those very deities they used to worship, and regret

their past actions that are certain to land them with a terrible end. It is all shown as if it is already happening now. The lesson the story delivers here is aimed primarily at the idolaters. Therefore, the chapter speaks at length on the basics of the monotheistic faith, the fallacy of polytheism, and the destiny of idolaters. All other aspects are only briefly hinted at, while they are nonetheless detailed in other chapters.

Questioning Popular Beliefs

The Prophet is instructed (26:69-26:70) to relate to them the story of Abraham whom the idolater Arabs considered themselves to be his heirs and the followers of his faith. The Prophet thus recounts how Abraham denounced what his father and people worshipped, which were no more than idols similar to those the ungrateful in Makkah worshipped. He also denounced their erring ways, asking them in a clear tone of disapproval: What is that you worship?

They answered (26:71) showing they certainly considered their idols deities, but the fact that they called them idols shows that they could not deny the fact that they were no more than statues made of stone, but to which they nevertheless devoted their worship. This is the ultimate degree of absurdity. Yet when people take up wrong beliefs, they lose sight of the absurdity of their concepts, worship and statements. Abraham begins to awaken their minds and hearts, highlighting the absurdity of their position. (26:72-73)

The least that should be true of a deity to whom worship is addressed is that it should have the same faculty of hearing as its worshipper. But these deities cannot hear their worshippers who appeal to them for benefit and the removal of harm and hardship. If they cannot hear, then how can they bring benefit or cause harm? Certainly the idolaters could not claim either quality for their idols. Hence, they did not answer Abraham because they realized that he was being sarcastic. Nevertheless, they could not refute what he said. Hence, when they do speak, they expose themselves as blind followers who do not reflect on their actions. (26:74) True, these idols cannot hear, bring benefit or cause harm, but we found our forefathers worshipping them and we follow in their footsteps. This is a disgraceful reply, but those idolaters were not ashamed to make it, nor were the Arabs in Makkah ashamed of doing likewise. It was sufficient that their forefathers did something for them to then accept it as valid without question.

Indeed a stumbling block in the way of the Islamic message was that the idolaters were required to abandon their forefathers' religion. This they did not want to do because it would detract from those an-

cestors' standing and constitute an acknowledgement that they were in error. This would be too disrespectful of their forefathers. Such otiose values are thus allowed to stand in the way of the truth. In times of inflexible obduracy people stick to such values in preference to the truth. Therefore, they needed to be shaken violently in order to release their minds and faculties. Patient and calm as he was, Abraham realized that the only way forward was to give them a real jolt, declaring his enmity to those idols and to the deviant beliefs that allowed such worship: He said: Do you see those which you have been worshipping—you and your forefathers of old? They are my enemies, except for the Lord of all the worlds. (26:75-26:77)

The fact that his own father and people worshipped such deities did not stop him from parting company with them, making clear his hostility to their errant beliefs. Thus, the Quran teaches believers that on the question of faith, no consideration is given to parents, ancestors or communities. The main bond is that of faith. Whatever else there is, is of secondary importance.

Abraham makes an exception in his hostility to what they and their ancestors worshipped, and this exception applies only to the Lord of all the worlds. It might be that some of their ancestors worshipped God before deviation crept into their faith. It might also be that some of them worshipped God alongside some other alleged deities. Hence, Abraham employs this precaution in order to make his statement precise, and this is only to be expected of Abraham when he speaks of faith.

Acknowledging God's Favors

Abraham then outlines the attributes of his Lord, the Lord of all the worlds, and the bond that exists between them at all times and in all situations. As we listen to his description we feel the close, inspirational relationship that acknowledges God's hand in everything that happens in life: It is He who has created me, and is the One who guides me. He is the One who gives me to eat and to drink. When I fall ill, He is the One who restores me to health, and will cause me to die and then will bring me back to life. It is He also who, I hope, will forgive me my faults on the Day of Judgment. (26:78-26:82)

Abraham's description of his Lord and the bond between them imparts a feeling that every part of his constitution feels this bond. Therefore, all his aspirations look to God with love and trust. It is as if Abraham actually sees his Lord and feels his grace with all his heart. As the Quran quotes Abraham's description, it gives it a melodious tone, one that imparts a very relaxed atmosphere, spreading its soothing, tranquil air. (26:78)

He has originated me from where He knows but I know not. This means that He knows everything about me: my constitution, nature, functions, feelings, and ultimate destiny. He is the One to guide me and provide me with the line I should follow in life. It is as if Abraham feels himself like an elastic material which God shapes the way He likes, giving it whatever form He chooses. He submits himself to God with full trust, perfectly assured that he is on the right course. (26:78-26:80) These are aspects of the direct, compassionate and loving care Abraham feels his Lord takes of him in all situations of health and sickness. Abraham demonstrates the utmost standard of politeness with his Lord by not attributing any illness to Him, although he knows well that both sickness and health occur by God's will. He only attributes to Him the blessings he enjoys and the care he receives: his food and drink as well as his health.

(26:81) signifies complete faith that it is God who deals death, and that He is certain to bring the dead back to life. Abraham, a prophet and a messenger of God, who knows his Lord and feels his presence and care in such a way, acknowledging such a close relationship with Him, expresses his dearest hope that on the Day of Judgement, God will forgive him his faults. (26:82) He does not entertain any thought that he is without fault. Indeed he acknowledges that he has these, but hopes to receive more of God's grace. He does not feel that his deeds, good as they may be, deserve any credit, but hopes for God's mercy and forgiveness. This is the best to hope for.

This statement combines feelings of God-consciousness, politeness and self-effacement. This is the right combination to truly appreciate the grace God bestows on us, which is great indeed, and the value of our actions, which is definitely petty. In his description of his Lord, Abraham combines all the elements of true faith: God's oneness, acknowledgement that He conducts all the affairs of human life on earth including every minute detail, resurrection after death, reckoning, God's grace and man's failings. His people denied these, as do all those who associate partners with God.

Prayer by a Devoted Worshipper

Now Abraham addresses a long, comprehensive and humble prayer to his Lord. (26:83-89) Nothing in Abraham's prayer concerns any aspect of the comforts and pleasures of this world, not even physical health. It looks to higher aspects, motivated by pure feelings. It is a prayer made by a heart which has true knowledge of God and, as a result, attributes little value to everything else. He has known God's grace and prays for more of it, and he entertains hopes and fears in accordance with his experience. This is said by Abraham,

the noble Prophet whose devotion is exemplary. What self-effacing humility! What concern about falling short of what is expected, and what fear of a change of heart! How keen he is to just be among the righteous! He feels that he can only achieve this if God guides him to do the righteous deeds that will bring him into such ranks.

This is a supplication (26:84) that hopes for extension in later generations, not through offspring, but through faith. What Abraham prays for is that he should have in later generations a true advocate who calls on people to follow the path of truth, bringing people back to the pure faith which he himself advocated. This may be the same prayer quoted elsewhere in the Quran as it speaks of his building of the Kabah with his son Ishmael. They both prayed. (2:127-2:129)

God answered his prayer (26:85) and gave him that advocate of the truth, sending those people a Messenger to teach them the true faith and to purify them. Such an answer to Abraham's prayer came several thousand years later, which is a very long time in people's reckoning, but a time that is nonetheless appropriate in God's judgement. Having already prayed that he should join the ranks of the righteous, through guidance to do what is good, now Abraham prays to be one of those who will be admitted to the garden of bliss which is inherited only by God's righteous servants. (26:86)

He prays for his own and God's forgiveness of his father despite all the harsh treatment and serious threats he had received from him. He had promised his father that he would pray for his forgiveness and he certainly fulfilled his promise. Later, the Quran makes clear that it is not permissible for a believer to pray for the forgiveness of anyone who associates partners with God, even though that person might be a close relative. The Quran also clarifies that Abraham prayed for the forgiveness of his father only because of a promise he had made to him. But when it became clear to him that he was God's enemy, he disowned him, (9:114) Abraham then realized that the true relation that should be observed is not that of blood; rather it is one of faith. This is an important aspect of correct Islamic education. The first bond that gives rise to any relation between two people is that of faith: if it is severed, then all relations are of little significance.

We appreciate the extent of Abraham's feeling about the hardships of the Day of Resurrection from his prayer (26:87-26:89) not to be then disgraced. We also feel his humility before his Lord and his fear that he might have fallen short of what was expected of him. We also realize how profoundly he felt the nature of that great Day from his description of it. (26:88-26:89) He also realizes that the only value recognized on that Day is a sincerity which makes one's heart purely devoted to God, allowing no consideration or personal desire

to detract from such devotion. This is the type of sound heart that is worthy of proper value. (26:88) Indeed, no other quality, property or consideration is of any benefit, because all are of a temporary nature and will inevitably come to an end. They may be coveted by people who try hard to possess such things in this life, but they are of no value in the ultimate reckoning.

A Question That Needs No Answer

We then have in the present passage a scene of the Day of Judgment, which was feared by Abraham. It is so vivid that he almost sees it with his own eyes as he addresses his humble prayer to God: Paradise will be brought within sight of the God-fearing; whereas the blazing fire will be placed in full view of the ones lost in error. It shall be said to them: 'Where is now all that you used to worship instead of God? Can they help you or even help themselves?' They will be hurled into hell, as also those who are lost in error, and Ibl s' hosts, all together. And there, quarrelling with one another, they will say: By God, we were obviously in error, when we deemed you equal to the Lord of all the worlds. It was only the truly guilty ones who led us astray. And now we have none to intercede for us nor any loving friend. Would that we had a second chance [in life], so that we could be believers.' (26:90-26:102)

The scene begins with an image of heaven being brought near, so as to be within sight of the God-conscious; those who actually remained apprehensive lest they might be made to suffer God's punishment. The fire of hell is also brought into full view of those who erred; those who strayed away from the right path and denied the Day of Judgment. As they stand within sight of hell, listening to stern rebukes for their bad deeds before they are thrown into hell, they will be first asked about the deities they used to worship. The question that will be put to them is: Where is now all that you used to worship instead of God? (26:92-26:93) Where are they? Can they help you or even help themselves? (26:93) No answer is heard from them. Indeed none is expected. It is only a question given by way of rebuke. Hence, (26:94-95) The very word used here, translated as 'hurled into', suggests that they fall into it, one on top of another, with much noise as a result. It is the same as when a landslide occurs, immediately followed by further ones. These people who were lost in error are accompanied in hell with Satan's hosts, all together." Indeed they are all part of Satan's hosts.

We are then made to listen to them as they speak in hell, saying to the false deities and the idols they worshipped. (26:97-26:98) They put the blame on those who led them into error and prevented them

from listening to divine guidance. They now wake up to the realization that it is all too late and that apportioning blame will benefit them nothing. (26:100-26:101) Neither deity nor friend will be of any avail to us now. But then they think that if there were a possibility of returning to life, they could still mend their erring ways. (26:102) This is nothing more than wishful thinking. There can be no return. They are already present on Judgment Day. This is followed by the chapter's standard comment. (26:103-26:104) This comment is repeated in the chapter every time the fate of any community that opposed God's messengers is shown, whether it be the Aad, the Thamud or Lot's people, and it also follows every sign given to any group who denied God and His messengers. The scene from the Day of Judgment that we have been discussing is shown here in place of a scene of punishment in this world. It shows the end faced by Abraham's people, and indeed the ultimate end of all idolatry. Hence, it delivers the same lesson in every historical account. We should remember that scenes of the Day of Judgment are shown in the Quran as if they are taking place in front of our eyes so as to touch our hearts and souls in the same way as they are touched when reflecting on the fate of past communities.

The Message of Abraham

Chapter 11: The 52nd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And certainly Our messengers drew near*
to Abraham with good tidings.
They said: Peace. He said: Peace.
And he presently produced a roasted calf. (11:69)
And when he saw their hands reach not out towards it,
he became suspicious and sensed awe of them.
They said: Fear not. . . . (11:70)

The Message of Abraham and Plea for the Folk of Lot

Abraham's woman, one who is standing up,
laughed when We gave her good tidings
of Isaac and besides Isaac, Jacob. (11:71)
She said: Woe to me! Will I give birth
when I am an old woman and this, my husband,
is an old man? Truly, this is a strange thing! (11:72)
They said: Marvel you at the command of God?
The mercy of God and His blessings be upon you,
O People of the House:

Truly, He is Worthy of Praise, Glorious. (11:73)
And when the panic went from Abraham
and the good tidings drew near to him,
he disputes with Us for the folk of Lot. (11:74)
Truly, Abraham was forbearing, sympathetic,
one who turns in repentance. (11:75)
O Abraham! Turn aside from this.
Truly, the command of your Lord drew near.
And, truly, that which arrives for them is a punishment,
one that is not to be repelled. (11:76)

Commentary°

11:74: Familiar or Miraculous? Nothing that God does should be considered strange. When it is the norm for something to happen in a particular fashion, this does not mean that that fashion is unchangeable. The norm can be broken when God so chooses, for a particular purpose of His own. The purpose here is to bestow His mercy and promised blessings to the believers in that household. Yet, when the norm is broken, whatever takes place as a result occurs in accordance with the overall divine laws of nature that we do not know in full. We cannot judge God's laws according to what happens during a short, limited period of time.

Those who try to restrict God's will to the laws of nature familiar to them are ignorant of the reality of Godhead as stated by God in His book. Whatever God states is true. Our human minds have no say in all this. Even those who restrict God's will to what He Himself has stated to be His law are again unaware of the true nature of Godhead. God's will is free and not restricted by His laws.

It is true that God conducts the affairs of this universe according to the laws He has set for it. This is, however, different from restricting God's will to these natural laws after they have been set in operation. The laws of nature work by God's will all the time. They are not automatic. At any time, God may choose to cause His natural laws to operate in a different way. Whenever this happens natural laws will change to the new fashion God has determined. The overall law of nature which governs the operation of all other laws is that which states that God's will is free and absolute. Every time any particular law operates, it does so according to God's free and absolute will.

Good News for Abraham

The account of Abraham opens here with the fact that he was to receive good news: Our messengers came to Abraham with good

news. (11:69) We are not told immediately what the good news was. This would come at the right moment, when his wife was present. The messengers were angels whose identity is left a mystery. Although some commentators on the Quran mention names and numbers, we prefer not to speculate, since we have no evidence to support such contentions.

They bade him peace, and he answered: Peace [be to you]. (11:69) Abraham had emigrated from his birthplace in Iraq, crossed the Jordan and settled in the land of the Canaanites which was largely a desert. Following the Bedouin tradition of hospitality, Abraham immediately went about preparing food for his guests: He then hastened to bring them a roasted calf. (11:69) He gets a fat calf, roasts and prepares it. He presents it to his guests who, as we have already said, were angels. Angels, however, do not eat what human beings eat. Therefore, they could not partake of the calf, and this worried Abraham: When he saw that their hands did not reach out to it, he felt their conduct strange and became apprehensive of them. (11:70) A guest who does not eat of the food given him causes worry. He makes his host nervous that he intends some kind of treachery. To this day, country people and Bedouins consider it a grave crime to act treacherously towards someone with whom they have shared food. Hence, if they refuse to eat someone's food, their action suggests that they either intend to do harm or that they do not trust the host's intentions. Therefore, the messengers reveal their identity to Abraham and tell him about their mission: They said: Do not be alarmed. We are sent to the people of Lot. (11:70)

Nothing that God does should be considered strange. When it is the norm for something to happen in a particular fashion, this does not mean that that fashion is unchangeable. The norm can be broken when God so chooses, for a particular purpose of His own. The purpose here is to bestow His mercy and promised blessings to the believers in that household. Yet, when the norm is broken, whatever takes place as a result occurs in accordance with the overall divine laws of nature which we do not know in full. We cannot judge God's laws according to what happens during a short, limited period of time.

At this point, Abraham was reassured. He was delighted by the good news given him by God's Messengers. This, however, did not make him overlook Lot and his people. Lot was his nephew who had emigrated with him from their birthplace and who lived in the neighboring area. He realized that the Messengers, or the angels were sent to destroy Lot's people. Compassionate and tender-hearted as Abraham was, he could not bear that the whole community should be so

destroyed. He began to plead for them.

Those who try to restrict God's will to the laws of nature familiar to them are ignorant of the reality of Godhead as stated by God in His book. Whatever God states is true. Our human minds have no say in all this. Even those who restrict God's will to what He Himself has stated to be His law are again unaware of the true nature of Godhead. God's will is free and not restricted by His laws.

It is true that God conducts the affairs of this universe according to the laws He has set for it. This is, however, different from restricting God's will to these natural laws after they have been set in operation. The laws of nature work by God's will all the time. They are not automatic. At any time, God may choose to cause His natural laws to operate in a different way. Whenever this happens natural laws will change to the new fashion God has determined. The overall law of nature which governs the operation of all other laws is that which states that God's will is free and absolute. Every time any particular law operates, it does so according to God's free and absolute will.

Angels Give Reward for the God-conscious

Chapter 15: The 54th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And tell them about the guests of Abraham* (15:51)
when they entered upon him and said:
Peace! He said: Truly, we are afraid of you. (15:52)
They said: Take no notice.
Truly, we give thee good tidings of a knowing boy. (15:53)
He said: Gave you good tidings to me
even though old age afflicted me?
So of what give you good tidings? (15:54)
They said: We gave thee good tidings of The Truth,
so thou art not of the ones who despair. (15:55)
He said: Who despairs of the mercy of his Lord,
but the ones who go astray? (15:56)

Commentary°

And tell them of the guests of Abraham, that is, the angels — there were twelve, ten or three of them, among them Gabriel.

15:51 Tell them about Abraham's guests, when they went in to him. In this account some of the details mentioned in other chapters are left out. The angels greet Abraham with a message of peace as they enter, but he tells them he is apprehensive about them. The [sign] does not mention the reason for his fear, nor does it mention

that he placed a roasted calf before them, as mentioned in Chapter 11, Hud. There we are told: When he saw that their hands did not reach out to it, he felt their conduct strange and became apprehensive of them. (11:70) The point of emphasis here is that God's grace is always bestowed on God's servants, as made clear by His messengers. Hence the details of Abraham's story are of little importance. They said: Do not be alarmed. We bring you the happy news of the birth of a son to you who will be endowed with knowledge. (11:53) The [sign] outlines this happy news without much detail of what else took place.

Here also we have Abraham's reply, without mentioning his wife and her intervention in the discussion that ensued: Said he: Do you give me this happy news when I have been overtaken by old age? Of what, then, is your good news? (15:54) First Abraham feels it unlikely that he would be given a son at his old age, particularly with his wife also being old and barren as mentioned in other chapters. Therefore, the angels remind him of the truth: They replied: That good news we have given you is the truth. So do not abandon hope. (15:55) Abraham immediately returns to his normal hopeful self, stating that he never lost hope of God's grace: He said: Who but a person going far astray abandons hope of His Lord's grace? (15:56)

The way he put this question (15:52) is indicative of his sharp sense of what is right. He gave those stones and wooden shapes their true names, 'images.' He did not call them 'deities.' Indeed, he stated his disapproval of their worship of those images by using the word 'devoted,' which indicates a permanent action. Needless to say, those people did not devote all their time to worshipping such idols, but they nonetheless attached great respect to them. This is, then, devotion in an abstract sense. The way Abraham put the question, describing them as permanent devotees to such idols, indicates that he considered their action absolutely absurd.

They defended their action. (15:53) Their answer indicates that they were in a stone-like inflexible state of mind that chained them to absurd traditions. They were far removed from freedom of thought, reflection and the proper evaluation of things and situations which belief in God generates as it breaks the chains of imaginary, baseless and traditional sanctities.

That such images were worshipped by their fathers (15:54) could not impart to such objects any value that they did not have. Nor could it have given them any undeserved sanctity. Nor is real value derived from giving forefathers an elevated status and following in their footsteps. It is rather the result of proper, free and objective judgment.

When Abraham confronted them with such objectivity they asked if what he was saying was true or was he just joking. (15:55) It is the kind of question asked only by someone who is unsure of his own beliefs, because he never questioned them to make sure they were right. Both his thinking and his soul are impaired by the myths and traditions he has thoughtlessly accepted. As such, he is uncertain about anything. Worship conversely must rely only on certainty, not on unsubstantiated myths. This is the state of loss that engulfs those who do not believe in a faith based on the clear truth of God's oneness that brings mind and conscience into perfect harmony.

Abraham, on the other hand, enjoys a state of complete certainty. He knows his Lord. His thoughts are full of the truth of His oneness. Hence, he says his response with absolute clarity. (15:56) He is the Lord of humanity, the heavens and earth: a single Lord who is the Creator of all. Indeed, creation and Lordship are two qualities that go hand in hand. Such is the straight and clear faith. It is totally different from what unbelievers think when they claim that there are several deities, whilst at the same time conceding that none of them creates except God, the only Creator. Yet still they worship such deities knowing they are powerless to create.

Abraham's Submission to God

Chapter 6: The 55th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And mention when Abraham*
said to his father Azar:
Have you taken idols to yourself as gods?
Truly, I see you and your folk clearly wandering astray. (6:74)
And, thus, We cause Abraham to see
the kingdom of the heavens and the earth
so that he would be of the ones who are certain in belief. (6:75)
So when night outspread over him, he saw a star.
He said: This is my Lord.
Then, when it set, he said: I love not that which sets. (6:76)
Then, when he saw the moon, that which rises, he said:
This is my Lord. Then, when it set, he said:
If my Lord guides me not, certainly,
I would have been among the folk,
the ones gone astray. (6:77)
Then, when he saw the sun, that which rises, he said:
This is my Lord. This is greater.
Then, when it set, he said: O my folk!
Truly, I am free from the partners you ascribe with Him. (6:78)
Truly, I turned my face to

He Who Originated the heavens and the earth
—as a monotheist and I am not
of the ones who are polytheists. (6:79)
And his folk argued with him. He said:
You argue with me about God while, surely, He guided me?
I fear not whatever partners you ascribe with Him.
When my Lord wills a thing, my Lord encompassed everything
in His knowledge. Will you not, then, recollect? (6:80)
And how should I fear what you ascribed as partners with Him
while you fear not that you ascribe as partners with God?
He sends not down to you any authority for it.
Then, which of the two groups of people
has better right to a place of sanctuary
if you had been knowing? (6:81)
Those who believed and confuse not their belief with injustice,
those, to them belongs the place of sanctuary.
And they are ones who are truly guided. (6:82)

Commentary°

This is the instinctive argument of nature voiced by Abraham who had not yet consciously recognized his true Lord. When human nature is free of deviation and perversion, it simply cannot accept that those idols worshipped by Abraham's people were gods. It should be remembered here that the ancient Chaldeans, who lived in Iraq at that time, used to worship idols as well as the stars and planets. To Abraham, the deity to be worshipped, to whom people turn for help in all situations, and who has created all living things, cannot be an idol made of stone or wood. It is obvious that those idols cannot create, listen, respond or provide sustenance. Hence, they are not worth worshipping. Indeed, they cannot be considered as deities even if they are given the limited role of being intermediaries between the Lord of the universe and human beings. Such a set-up and practices are, then, all erroneous. Abraham recognized this instinctively at the first instant. Indeed, he provides a complete example of human nature as created by God: pure, and free of perversion. It confronts error and deviation with clarity and decisiveness, stating the whole truth, since the matter is one of faith. (6:74)

The Other Messengers Followed Abraham's Footsteps

Makkah: *And that was Our disputation*
that We gave Abraham against his folk.
We exalt in degrees whom We will,

truly, thy Lord is Wise, Knowing. (6:83)
And We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob ...
And, thus, We gave recompense
to the ones who are doers of good. (6:84)
***
And from among their fathers and their offspring
and their brothers/sisters,
We elected them and We guided them
to a straight path. (6:87)
That is guidance of God. He guides with it
whom He wills of His servants.
And if they ascribed partners with Him,
what they had been doing was fruitless for them. (6:88)
Those are those to whom We gave the Book
and critical judgment and prophethood.
So if these are ungrateful for them, then,
surely, We charged a folk with them
who is not of the ones who are ungrateful for them. (6:89)
Those are those whom God guided.
So imitate their guidance.
Say: I ask of you no compensation for it.
It is not but a reminder for the worlds. (6:90)

Abraham's Message of Worshipping the One God

Chapter 37: The 56th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, truly, among his partisans*
was Abraham. (37:83)
When he drew near his Lord with a pure-hearted heart, (37:84)
when he said to his father and to his folk:
What is it that you worship? (37:85)
Is it a calumny that you want gods other than God! (37:86)
Then, what is your opinion about the Lord of the worlds? (37:87)
And he looked on them with a glimpse at the stars (37:88)
and he said: Truly, I am ill! (37:89)
But they turned away from him as ones who draw back (37:90)
and he turned upon their gods then, said: Will you not eat? (37:91)
Why speak you not for yourselves? (37:92)
Then, he turned upon them,
striking them with his right hand. (37:93)
Then, the people came forward towards him rushing. (37:94)
He said: Worship you what you yourselves carve out (37:95)
while God created you and what you do? (37:96)
They said: Build for him a structure.

Then, cast him into hellfire. (37:97)
So they wanted to use cunning against him,
but We made them the lowest. (37:98)
He said: Truly, I am one who goes to my Lord.
He will guide me. (37:99)
My Lord! Bestow on me
among the ones in accord with morality. (37:100)
So We gave him the good tidings
of a forbearing boy. (37:101)
And when he reached maturity endeavoring with him,
he said: O my son! Truly, I see while slumbering
that I am sacrificing ***you****. So look on what* ***you*** *have considered?*
He said: O my father! Accomplish whatever ***you*** *are commanded.*
You *will find me, if God willed,*
of the ones who remain steadfast. (37:102)
Then, when they both submitted themselves to God
and he flung him on his brow (37:103)
We cried out to him: O Abraham! (37:104)
Surely, ***you*** *had established the dream as true.*
Thus, We give recompense
to the ones who are doers of good. (37:105)
Truly, that was, certainly, the clear trial. (37:106)
And, then, We took ransom for him
with a sublime slaughter (37:107)
and We left for him a good name with the later ones: (37:108)
Peace be on Abraham! (37:109)
Thus, We give recompense
to the ones who are doers of good. (37:110)
Truly, he is one of Our believing servants. (37:111)
And We gave him the good tidings of Isaac, a Prophet,
among the ones in accord with morality. (37:112)
And We blessed him and Isaac. And of their offspring
are ones who are doers of good
and ones who are clearly unjust to themselves. (37:113)

Commentary°

Thus the story opens, moving from Noah to Abraham and making it clear that they were related in faith and its advocacy. Thus Abraham is said to belong to Noah's community despite the long time gap between them. Nonetheless they shared the same divine constitution and message.

It is to commemorate this great event that serves as a symbol of true faith and submission to God that Muslims celebrate the Sacrifice

or al-Adha. This event serves as a reference point for the Muslim community to know their first father, Abraham, whose faith it follows and to whom it traces its ancestry. It thus understands the nature of its faith, based on submission to God's will with perfect acceptance and reassurance. It will never need to ask God why. It will never hesitate to do His bidding, once it realizes what He wants of it. It gives its all, withholding nothing, and choosing no particular way or form of offering. It simply does what He bids it to do. The Muslim community also knows that God does not wish to overburden it with the test, nor put it to hardship. All He needs is that Muslims should be ready to give whatever they are required to give, in full obedience and commitment, without hesitation. Once they prove such complete dedication, He will remove the need for their sacrifice and pain. He will consider that they have fulfilled their duty and reward them for that, replacing their sacrifice and honoring them as He honored their father, Abraham.

He is remembered by one generation after another. (Verse 108) He is the father of all prophets, and the founding father of the Muslim community that inherits his faith. God has assigned to the Muslim community the task of leading humanity on the basis of Abraham's faith. In so doing, God has made the Muslim community Abraham's descendants for the rest of human life.

The chapter moves on to the second episode it relates of Abraham's history. After he was saved from the fire, he closed that chapter of his life to begin a new phase: "And Abraham said I will go to my Lord: He is sure to guide me." (37:99) His words indicate that he was migrating, this in both a mental and physical sense. He was abandoning everything: his father, family, home, people and land, leaving them all behind and going to his Lord, free of all concerns. He thus surrendered himself to his Lord, assured that He would give him guidance and care, setting him on the right path. It is a migration from one state to another, abandoning all ties and bonds in favor of one bond that remains pure and strong. His words express complete faith and unqualified surrender.

Until that moment, Abraham was without children. He had left behind his relations, friends and all that was familiar to him. Needless to say, his relations with those who threw him in the fire suffered a final breakdown. Therefore, he went to his Lord, praying to Him to grant him believing offspring: "Lord! Grant me a righteous son." (37:100) And God answered his true servant's prayer: "We gave him the happy news that he will have a forbearing son." (37:101) The son was most probably Ishmael, as clearly inferred from his life story and from the chapter itself. Indeed, we can see the mark of his for-

bearance in his youth. We can also imagine the delight experienced by Abraham in his new abode, where he was a stranger, at the birth of this son described by God as a 'forbearing son.'

It is time for us now to look at the glorious attitude that Abraham's life story represents, drawing from it an inspiring lesson as presented by God Almighty to the Muslim community.

When the boy was old enough to work with his father, Abraham said: My son! I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice you. Tell me, then, what you think. [Ishmael] said My father.! Do as you are bidden, and, God willing, you will find me to be patient in adversity. (37:102)

What effect will faith not produce? We see here Abraham in his old age, cut off in a foreign land, having deserted his homeland and his people, being given a child. The child turns out to be a model son, with his forbearance confirmed by God Himself. Hardly had Abraham enjoyed his son's company and seen his youth blooming so as to become his companion and assistant, when he sees in his dream that he should slaughter him. He understands that it is a sign from God requiring sacrifice. What is his attitude now? He does not hesitate for a moment. The thought of disobedience does not even occur to him. He thinks only of submission. It is true that the dream was only a signal, not a clear and direct order issued through revelation. It was a signal by his Lord though, and that was enough for Abraham to comply, not to delay, and not even to ask why.

Moreover, his compliance did not betray any feeling of distress, horror or panic; it was marked by calm acceptance and reassurance, reflected in his words as he put this most grave matter to his son: My son! I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice you. Tell me, then, what you think. (37:102) These are the words of a man in full control of himself and his feelings, knowing that he is only doing his duty and trusting that it behooves him to comply. We do not see any element of panic driving a person to do even what he feels to be repugnant, in order to get it done and finished with.

That it was hard for Abraham is beyond doubt. He was not required to send his only son to war, nor to put him to a task that would end in his death. Nothing of the sort. Instead he was required to undertake the task himself, by his own hand. And what task was that? It was to slaughter his own son by way of sacrifice. This was the order he received calmly, the one that he put to his son and asked him to consider carefully. He did not take his son by surprise and do what was bidden. Rather, he puts the question to him as if it were both normal and familiar. To Abraham, the question was one of obedience. Since his Lord wanted something, so be it, without hesitation.

His son should also know and accept it willingly, with submission so that he too would earn the reward of obeying God and experience the pleasure of submission to Him. He himself had known that pleasure and now wants his son to feel it as the pure goodness that surpasses all else that life can offer.

What does the son say as his father proposes to slaughter him in fulfillment of what he saw in a dream? The son also rises to the sublime standard his father had earlier attained: He said: My father! Do as you are bidden, and, God willing, you will find me to be patient in adversity. (37:102) This is not a response of mere obedience and resignation. It is a response marked with acceptance and certainty. His reply begins with: My father! The prospect of his death does not cause him to panic or to forget his manners and love of his father. Do as you are bidden. He also feels the same as his father, taking the dream as a signal, which means an order. This is sufficient to make him willing to carry it out without hesitation.

Furthermore, we see in Ishmael's response proper manners with his Lord, and recognition of the limits of his ability in the face of hardship. Therefore, he seeks his Lord's help to overcome his weakness. He attributes to God the grace of helping him to obey and make the sacrifice: God willing, you will find me to be patient in adversity. (37:102) He does not press the matter as a heroic act on his part. Nor does he describe it as facing the danger and caring little for the consequences. He does not give himself any credit in the matter; he simply attributes it all to God who has helped him in carrying out His orders with patience in adversity. This is an example of perfect humility before God, trust in Him, combined with complete obedience and submission to His will.

The scene moves further to show us the order being carried out: When the two of them had surrendered themselves to the will of God, and Abraham laid him prostrate on his forehead. (37:103) Once more, obedience, faith and acceptance of God's will rise to a far nobler standard than anything known to humanity. The father puts his son prostrate before him and the son submits and shows no resistance. All this takes place in reality. Such is self surrender, which is the essence of Islam: complete trust, obedience, certainty, acceptance, submission and action. Both father and son experience nothing other than pure faith.

The point here is not one of bravery, courage, enthusiasm or heroic action which a warrior might feel in battle. A committed fighter may undertake a task knowing that his chance of survival is negligible. However, this is totally different from what Abraham and Ishmael were doing: for them, there is no boiling situation, no rush

of enthusiasm prompting hasty action before weakness or hesitation can creep in. Theirs is a rational self surrender, with full knowledge of what they want, and complete reassurance about what will take place. More than that, they coolly appreciate the pleasure of obeying God's orders.

At this stage, Abraham and Ishmael have done all that is required of them. They have submitted themselves and carried out the order. All that remained was the actual shedding of Ishmael's blood and his death, which, in God's scales, counted for little, compared with the energy, feelings and determination both father and son put into what was bidden of them. By this time, the test had reached its climax, its results were known and its objectives fulfilled. What remained was physical pain and a dead body, but God does not want His servants to endure suffering. He does not require them to torment or kill themselves. Once they have submitted themselves and shown their true willingness to do what He bids, then they have fulfilled what is required and passed the test successfully.

Deliverance

God witnessed the sincerity shown by both Abraham and Ishmael, and He considered them to have fulfilled all that was required of them:

God called to him and ransomed [Ishmael] with a noble sacrifice. (37:104-37:107) You have indeed fulfilled all you needed to fulfill. God wants nothing from His servants other than that they submit themselves to Him totally, so that they have nothing which they consider too dear or too precious to give up, not even an only son, or their own lives. You, Abraham, have done this, offering everything dear, with certainty and acceptance. What was left was flesh and blood, which could be substituted by any type of flesh and blood. Thus, God ransomed this young man who had submitted himself to His will by a great and noble sacrifice. It is reported that the sacrifice was a ram that Abraham found ready by God's will and that he sacrificed this ram in place of Ishmael.

Abraham was then told that that is how God rewards the good. (37:105) We reward them by choosing them for such a test, directing their minds and hearts to rise to the necessary level, helping them in such fulfillment and then giving them the reward they deserve.

It is to commemorate this great event that serves as a symbol of true faith and submission to God that Muslims celebrate the Sacrifice or al-Adha. This event serves as a reference point for the Muslim community to know their first father, Abraham, whose faith it follows and to whom it traces its ancestry. It thus understands the nature of

its faith, based on submission to God's will with perfect acceptance and reassurance. It will never need to ask God why. It will never hesitate to do His bidding, once it realizes what He wants of it. It gives its all, withholding nothing, and choosing no particular way or form of offering. It simply does what He bids it to do. The Muslim community also knows that God does not wish to overburden it with the test, nor put it to hardship. All He needs is that Muslims should be ready to give whatever they are required to give, in full obedience and commitment, without hesitation. Once they prove such complete dedication, He will remove the need for their sacrifice and pain. He will consider that they have fulfilled their duty and reward them for that, replacing their sacrifice and honoring them as He honored their father, Abraham.

He is remembered by one generation after another. (37:108) He is the father of all prophets, and the founding father of the Muslim community that inherits his faith. God has assigned to the Muslim community the task of leading humanity on the basis of Abraham's faith. In so doing, God has made the Muslim community Abraham's descendants for the rest of human life.

Guidance Rests Exclusively with God

Chapter 43: The 63rd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Mention when Abraham*
said to his father and his folk:
Truly, I am released from obligation to what you worship (43:26)
other than He Who originated me and, truly,
He will guide me. (43:27)
And He made it an enduring Word among his posterity,
so that perhaps they will return. (43:28)

Commentary°

The Quraysh, the major Arabian tribe living in Makkah at the time of the revelation of the Quran, used to say that they were Abraham's descendants, which was true. They also claimed that they followed Abraham's faith, which was untrue. Abraham espoused monotheism, clear and undistorted. It was for his belief in the One God that he abandoned his father and his people, after he was subjected to execution by burning. His religion is based on this basic belief. He urged his children and descendants to remain true to it. Thus, no trace of polytheism is ever found in his faith.

The precept of monotheism rejected by the Quraysh was nothing but the belief advocated by Abraham, from whom they descended. It was this great principle that Abraham declared to his own father

and people, thus rejecting their false creed, disowning their traditional worship. He did not adopt falsehood simply because his father and people practised it. In fact, he did not pay them any courtesy when he declared his rejection of it in a clear and emphatic statement quoted: *Mention when Abraham said to his father and his folk: Truly, I am released from obligation to what you worship other than He Who originated me and, truly, He will guide me.* (43:26-43:27)

Abraham clearly stated this precept of God's Oneness to which the whole universe testifies. *And He made it an enduring Word among his posterity, so that perhaps they will return.* (43:28)

Abraham clearly stated this precept of God's Oneness to which the whole universe testifies. (43:28) It fell to Abraham to have the largest share in establishing this precept in life, delivering it to future generations through his seed. A number of his descendants were Prophets and Messengers, among whom three belong to the very select group of messengers endowed with the strongest resolve. These three are Moses, Jesus and Muhammad (peace be upon them all). Today, scores of centuries after Abraham, more than a billion people who follow the three divine religions are indebted to Abraham for their belief in the fundamental principle of God's Oneness. It was he who made it an abiding precept among his descendants. Many of them may abandon it, but it remains firm, clear and undistorted. Thus, people will always have a chance to return to God, their Creator, and worship Him. This represents a return to the truth, understanding it and holding firm to it.

A Son Prophesied to Abraham

Chapter 51: The 67th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Truly, approached **you***
the discourse of guests of Abraham,
the ones who are honored? (51:24)
When they entered to him they said: Peace.
He said: Peace, to a folk, ones who are unknown. (51:25)
Then, he turned upon his people
and brought about a fattened calf (51:26)
so he brought it near to them. He said: Will you not eat? (51:27)
Then, he sensed a fear of them; they said: Be not in awe.
They gave him good tidings of a knowing boy. (51:28)
*They said: Thus, spoke **your** Lord.*
Truly, He is The Wise, The Knowing. (51:30)

Commentary°

These signs speak of a sign or signs in the history of the divine

message, just like those signs in the earth and within the human being to which these signs referred. It also refers to a promise or promises that are fulfilled.

It describes Abraham's guests as honored, either because they are so in God's sight, or because of how Abraham paid honor to them as we soon learn. Abraham's hospitality appears very clearly from the first moment his guests arrived. Once they greeted him and received his reply, and despite the fact that they are total strangers, he immediately goes to his wife telling her to prepare food. He provides a large quantity of food, sufficient for scores of people. (51:26) According to some reports, there were only three guests, which means that a shoulder of that calf would have been sufficient to give them a good meal ... He was concerned because they were not eating.

[They then] revealed their identity, reassuring him and giving him the good news they had brought him. This was the happy news of Isaac's birth.

Everything will come into existence once the command, 'Be,' is given. God said it, so what can prevent His order from being fulfilled? Familiar habits limit our imagination and understanding. Therefore, we are surprised when we see something running counter to what is familiar. Yet God's will is free, unrestricted by anything that may be familiar to the human being in his small world. It creates whatever He wills, without limitation.

It begins its reference to Abraham by the question. (51:24) This style is used to prepare our minds for what comes next. He asked this question (51:27) after he saw that their hands did not touch the food and it looked as if they would not eat the meal that had been provided. He became concerned, apprehensive either because a stranger who refuses to eat his host's food appears treacherous and causes an element of apprehension, or because he noticed something odd about them.

These verses speak of a sign or signs in the history of the divine message, just like those signs in the earth and in man to which these verses referred. It also refers to a promise or promises that are fulfilled.

It begins its reference to Abraham by the question. (51:24) This style is used to prepare our minds for what comes next. It describes Abrahams guests as 'honored', either because they are so in God's sight, or because of how Abraham paid honor to them as we soon learn. Abraham's hospitality appears very clearly from the first moment his guests arrived. Once they greeted him and received his reply, and despite the fact that they are total strangers, he immediately goes to his wife telling her to prepare food. He provides a large quan-

tity of food, sufficient for scores of people. (51:26) According to some reports, there were only three guests, which means that a shoulder of that calf would have been sufficient to give them a good meal.

He asked this question (51:27) after he saw that their hands did not touch the food and it looked as if they would not eat the meal that had been provided. He became concerned, apprehensive either because a stranger who refuses to eat his host's food appears treacherous and causes an element of apprehension, or because he noticed something odd about them. Therefore, they revealed their identity, reassuring him and giving him the good news they had brought him. (51:28) This was the happy news of Isaac's birth.

His wife (51:29) overheard the good news, was stunned and surprised. She could not stop herself from crying out in amazement. In the habitual reaction of women, she slapped herself on both cheeks and said: A barren old woman! This was a further expression of her surprise given she was elderly, and had been barren throughout her life. Stunned by this totally unexpected piece of news, she forgot that those bringing the good news were angels. Therefore, the angels reminded her of the basic truth that there is no limit to God's power, and that He determines everything on the basis of perfect wisdom and absolute knowledge. (51:30)

Abraham and His Guests

Abraham said: O ones who are sent,
what is your business? (51:31)
They said that we were sent to a folk, ones who sin, (51:32)
to send on them rocks of clay, (51:33)
ones distinguished by thy Lord
for ones who are excessive. (51:34)
So We brought out whoever had been in it
of the ones who believe. (51:35)
But We found in it nothing but a house
of ones who submit to God. (51:36)
And We left a sign in it
for those who fear the painful punishment. (51:37)

Abraham Had Been a Community—a Monotheist

Chapter 16: The 70th Chapter Revealed

Abraham had been a community obedient to God—a monotheist—
he is not among the ones who are polytheists. (16:120)
He was one who is thankful for His divine blessings.
He elected him and guided him to a straight path. (16:21)
And He gave him in the present benevolence.

And, truly, in the world to come he will be
among the ones in accord with morality. (16:22)
Again, we revealed to ***you*** *that* ***you*** *follow the creed of Abraham—*
a monotheist.
And he had not been among
the ones who are polytheists. (16:23)

Passionate Prayer by a Devoted Believer

Chapter 14: The 72nd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And when Abraham said: My Lord!*
Make this land one that is safe
and cause me and my children to turn away
from worshipping idols. (14:35)
My Lord! Truly, they caused to go astray many among humanity;
so whoever heeded me, truly, he is of me.
And whoever rebelled against me,
then ***You*** *are, truly, Forgiving, Compassionate.* (14:36)
Our Lord! Truly, I caused to dwell some of my offspring
in an unsown valley by ***Your*** *Holy House,*
O our Lord, they, certainly, perform the formal prayer.
So make the minds among humanity yearn for them
and provide them with fruits
so that perhaps they will give thanks. (14:37)
Our Lord! Truly, ***You*** *have known what we conceal*
and what we speak openly.
And nothing is hidden from God
in or on the earth or in heaven. (14:38)
The Praise belongs to God Who bestowed on me
in my old age Ishmael and Isaac.
And, truly, my Lord is Hearing the supplication. (14:39)
My Lord! Make me one who performs the formal prayer and from
my offspring also.
Our Lord! Receive my supplication. (14:40)
Our Lord! Forgive ***You*** *me and the ones who are my parents*
and the ones who believe on the Day the reckoning arises. (14:41)

Commentary°

When the human conscience is awakened, he looks at the universe around him and realizes that it is made for his benefit, either directly or through the harmony between its laws and human life and needs. When he looks around him, he finds it all made friendly by God's grace, and by His power and permission it is both helpful and useful. When human beings considers and contemplates, he must

stand in awe of his Lord, prostrate himself and express his gratitude. He always looks up to his Lord to replace with ease any hardship he may be going through, and to preserve any aspect of grace and happiness he may be enjoying.

The perfect example of a human being who always remembers God and expresses his gratitude to Him is Abraham, the father of Prophets. His truly thankful character imparts a definite ambience to the whole chapter of Abraham, which also reflects God's grace and how it is received with gratitude or ingratitude. Abraham is shown here in a scene of devotion, making a heartfelt appeal to God. His melodious supplication is inspirational as it rises to God in heaven.

Abraham prays [in front of the House he built for God in Makkah] ... Abraham is shown addressing his supplication with perfect devotion and heartfelt gratitude. This should make the ungrateful reflect and revise their attitude. It should make the ungrateful turn back to faith, and the oblivious remember God. It should make people generally follow Abraham in his exemplary attitude.

Abraham is fully aware of the great number of people in his generation and previous generations who went astray when they were deluded by such idols. Hence, he addresses his passionate appeal to God to spare him from such delusion:

Abraham continues his supplication (14:36) stating that whoever follows his way and does not give in to idol worship belongs to him, as they would have the strongest bond of faith joining them together. The others who disobey him he leaves to God to determine what He does with them.

In this last prayer we see Abraham, the caring, forbearing and compassionate. He does not pray to God to destroy those of his offspring who leave his path of guidance. He does not precipitate God's punishment. Indeed he does not even mention punishment. Instead, he leaves them to God, to His forgiveness and mercy. Thus Abraham lends to the whole scene an air of forgiveness and compassion, leaving the taint of disobedience to disappear altogether. Compassionate as he is, Abraham does not let it appear again....

Why does Abraham pray that they should have such fruit? To eat and enjoy themselves? Certainly, but also to bring about what Abraham, exemplary in his gratitude to his Lord, hopes for: *so that perhaps they will give thanks.* Thus the purpose of settling close to the Sacred House is given prominence. It is to establish regular prayer in the most devoted and pure form. Similarly, the purpose of the prayer to incline people's hearts to the dwellers in the neighborhood of the Sacred House and their abundant provision from the fruits of the earth is to give thanks to God who provides all....

Abraham follows his thanksgiving with a supplication to God to make him always thankful. His thanks take the form of prayer, worship and obedience to God. Thus he declares his determination to always be a devout worshipper, but fears that something may divert him from it. Hence, he prays that God may help him to carry out his intention. . . .

Abraham Questioning His People's Beliefs

Chapter 21: The 73rd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Certainly, We gave Abraham*
his right judgment before.
And We had been ones who know of him (21:51)
when he said to his father and his folk:
What are these images to which you be
ones who give yourselves up to? (21:52)
They said: We found our fathers
as ones who are worshippers of them. (21:53)
He said: Certainly, you and your fathers had been
in a clear wandering astray. (21:54)
*They said: Had **you** drawn near The Truth*
*or are **you** of the ones who play?* (21:55)
He said: Nay! Your Lord is the Lord
of the heavens and the earth,
Who originated them. And I am of the ones
who bear witness to this: (21:56)
And by God, I will contrive against your idols
after you turn as ones who draw back. (21:57)
So he made them broken pieces—but the greatest of them—
so that perhaps they will return to it. (21:58)
They said: Who accomplished this with our gods?
Truly, he is of the ones who are unjust! (21:59)
They said: We heard a spiritual warrior (m) mention them.
It is said he is Abraham. (21:60)
They said: Then, approach with him
before the eyes of personages
so that perhaps they will bear witness. (21:61)
*They said: Have **you** accomplished this with our gods*
O Abraham? (21:62)
He said: Nay! It was accomplished by the greatest of them—this.
So ask them if they had been able to speak for themselves. (21:63)
Then, they returned to one another. Then, they said:
Truly, you, you are the ones who are unjust. (21:64)
Again, they were put into confusion:

Certainly, you had known
that these speak not for themselves! (21:65)
He said: Worship you, then, other than God
what neither profits you nor hurts you at all? (21:66)
Fie on you on what you worship other than God.
Will you not, then, be reasonable? (21:67)
They said: Burn him and help your gods
if you had been ones who do so! (21:68)
We said: O fire! Be coolness and peace for Abraham! (21:69)
And they wanted to use cunning against him,
but We made them the ones who are losers. (21:70)
And We delivered him and Lot to the
region which We blessed for the worlds. (21:71)
And We bestowed Isaac on him and Jacob as an unexpected gift.
And We made both of them ones in accord with morality. (21:72)
And We made them leaders, guiding by Our command.
And We revealed to them the accomplishing of good deeds
and the performing of the formal prayer and the giving of the
purifying alms. And they had been ones who worship Us. (21:73)

Commentary°

The episode narrated here is that of Abraham's message, given in a sequence of scenes that leave short gaps in between. It starts by mentioning that Abraham was initially given *right judgment*, which here means God's Oneness. In fact, it is the most important aspect of guidance which is clearly understood here as the referent of the phrase, *right judgment.* This means that God gave Abraham his sense of what is right, knowing his aptitude to bear the trust given to His Messengers.

It was to the land of Palestine that he and his nephew, Lot, emigrated. This was the land to receive revelations from on high for a very long time and the area where Prophets and Messengers of Abraham's descent were raised. This area incorporates the holy land where the second house of worship was built. It is a fertile land with rich tillage. All these blessings were added to that of the generations of Prophets living there.

And We bestowed Isaac on him....

Abraham left his home country where his family and community lived. So God compensated him with this blessed land as a better country to live in. He also gave him his son Isaac and grandson Jacob to be a better family than the one he had earlier. He also gave him a better community than his old one and raised from his offspring leaders to give humanity guidance. He inspired them to do all sorts of

good works, to attend to their prayers and to give regular charity. They were obedient worshippers of God. All this was Abraham's blessed compensation given by God for his perseverance when he was tested. It was a goodly compensation to fit his endurance in adversity.

The Message of Abraham

Chapter 29: The 85th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And when Abraham said to his folk:*
Worship God
and be God-conscious of Him.
That would be better for you if you had been knowing. (29:16)
You only worship graven images and not God?
And you create calumny?
Truly, those whom you worship other than God
possess not for you any power to provide for you.
So look for the provision from God
and worship Him and give thanks to Him.
To Him you will be returned. (29:17)
And if you deny, then, surely, communities denied before you.
And for the Messenger is not but
the delivering of the clear message. (29:18)

Commentary°

These [signs] move on several centuries bringing into focus the divine message as preached by Abraham. Abraham's call to his people was clear, unambiguous and very well structured. It served as a good model for all advocates of the divine faith. He started by telling them of the true nature of his message. Furthermore, he made this appealing to them, stating that it contained much goodness for them, if they would only know it....

Abraham directs people to seek their provisions from God. On Him alone should they rely for what is most important in their lives. Provisions and sustenance are people's first preoccupation, particularly those who have not experienced the meaning of faith. Yet to seek sustenance from God alone is the most obvious thing to do.

Finally, Abraham calls on them to address their worship and thanks to God who grants sustenance and bestows blessings on all creatures. (29:17) He also tells them that their return to God is inevitable....

Issues Clarified

These signs move on several centuries bringing into focus the

divine message as preached by Abraham. (29:16-29:18) Abraham's call to his people was clear, unambiguous and very well structured. It served as a good model for all advocates of the divine faith. He started by telling them of the true nature of his message. (29:16) Furthermore, he made this appealing to them, stating that it contained much goodness for them, if they would only know it. (29:16)

In other words, if they were not ignorant, they would choose what was good for them. This is a simple and real truth that needs no fiery speeches to impart its essence.

Then Abraham explains how flawed their religion is, especially their worship of wooden statues. What an absurd substitute for worshipping the Almighty. Secondly, evidence to support their beliefs was completely lacking; they only invented what was false. Furthermore, such statues and idols are of no benefit, as they cannot provide people with anything. (29:17)

Then Abraham directs people to seek their provisions from God. On Him alone should they rely for what is most important in their lives. (29:17) Provisions and sustenance are people's first preoccupation, particularly those who have not experienced the meaning of faith. Yet to seek sustenance from God alone is the most obvious thing to do.

Finally, Abraham calls on them to address their worship and thanks to God who grants sustenance and bestows blessings on all creatures. (29:17) He also tells them that their return to God is inevitable. It is better for them, then, that they should turn to Him now as believers and address their worship and gratitude to Him alone. (29:17)

Abraham and the Fire

Makkah: *So the answer of his folk had been not but that they said:*
Kill him or burn him! Then, God rescued him from the fire.
Truly, in this are, certainly, signs for a folk who believe. (29:24)
And he said: You take only to yourselves graven images
instead of God because of affection
among yourselves for this present life.
Again, on the Day of Resurrection
some of you will disavow some others
and some of you will curse some others
and your place of shelter will be the fire.
And for you there will be no ones who help. (29:25)
So Lot believed in him. And Abraham said:
Truly, I am one who emigrates for my Lord.
Truly, He, He is The Almighty, The Wise. (29:26)

And We bestowed Isaac and Jacob on him and We assigned to his offspring prophethood and the Book. We gave him his compensation in the present. And, truly, in the world to come he will be, certainly, among the ones in accord with morality. (29:27)
And Lot, when he said to his folk: Truly, you approach indecency which none who preceded you committed in the worlds. (29:28)
*You approach men with lust and sever the way and approach that which is unlawful in your conclave. Then, the answer of his folk had not been but that they said: Bring on us the punishment of God if **you** had been among the ones who are sincere.* (29:39)
He said: My Lord! Help me against the folk, ones who make corruption. (29:30)
And when Our Messengers drew near Abraham with the good tidings. They said: Truly, We are ones who will cause to perish the people of this town. Truly, its people had been ones who are unjust. (29:31)

Commentary°

(And when Our Messengers) Gabriel and the angels who were with him (brought Abraham the good news) that he will have a son, (they said) to Abraham: (Lo! we are about to destroy the people of that township) the township of Lot, (for its people are wrong-doers) they are idolaters who brought destruction upon themselves because of their abominable acts.

Abraham and Nimrod

Chapter 2: The 87th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *Have **you** not considered him who argued with Abraham about his Lord because God gave him dominion? Mention when Abraham said: My Lord is He Who gives life and causes to die. He said: I give life and cause to die. Abraham said: Truly, God brings the sun from the East, so bring **you** the sun from the West! Then, he who was ungrateful was dumfounded. And God guides not the unjust folk.* (2:258)

Commentary°

The first sign in this passage relates an argument between the Prophet Abraham and a contemporary king who disputed his belief in God. The sign does not mention the king's name, because men-

tioning it will not add to the moral of the story. This argument is related to the Prophet and the Muslim community in a way that invites amazement at this person who disputes the truth of God. We listen as though the argument is taking place now, before our eyes.

We learn from the text that the king who argued with Abraham did not, in fact, deny God's existence, but he denied that He was the only God or that He had sole sovereignty and control over humanity's affairs. This belief was prevalent among the Arabs during their Dark Ages or Age of Ignorance. They assigned lesser gods as partners to God and denied that God had any concern with, or authority over, worldly and daily human affairs.

The arrogant, stubborn king denies God for the very reason that he should acknowledge Him, as it was God who had made it possible for him to become king and ruler, in the first place. Power in the hands of those who do not believe or appreciate God's grace and generosity corrupts and leads to tyranny and despotism. Rulers govern by God's authority, and He never empowers them to enslave and oppress their people, or impose their own ideas and laws. Like their subjects, they are servants of God and subject to His authority. Their power is delegated by Him. They have no right to initiate or devise teachings and legislation of their own....

Abraham challenged the king. Life and death are two of the greatest wonders of this world which we witness every day. Thinking about them compels the human mind to seek a non-human cause behind them. There is, therefore, no escaping the conclusion that the supreme omnipotent power of God, and no other, lies behind the secrets of life and death. We remain ignorant of the true essence of life and death, but we perceive their manifestations in the world around us, and we are forced to seek their origin and cause with a power unlike any power known to man, and that is the power of God Almighty.

The passage presents two simple but profound truths: one taken from within the human being, that God gives life and causes death, and the other from the natural world around, that God causes the sun to rise in the east, and not in the west. These are familiar occurrences, available for all to see and contemplate, requiring little knowledge or effort to perceive or understand. The human being only needs to allow his inner nature to respond and react to these imposing phenomena, the impact of which cannot be mistaken or escaped, unless one is being deliberately stubborn or bent on rejecting the truth.

Abraham (2:258) cites an attribute that is unique to God Almighty, with no one else able to claim a share of it for himself. The statement implies, too, that God rules and legislates over all. It is clear that in his reply Abraham, a noble Prophet, was not seeking

to establish God's power in the mere acts of originating life and taking it away. Both are prerogatives of God alone.

Abraham's interlocutor saw his sovereign position over his subjects and his ability to kill them or let them live as evidence of his having more than temporal authority over them. His reply (2:258) implies having absolute power and authority over the affairs and destiny of his people, who are obliged to submit to his rule.

Abraham did not wish to pursue the argument about the meaning of originating life and causing death, with someone who twists facts. He simply took the argument to a different sphere, citing another familiar event and challenging the obdurate king to alter a natural phenomenon, the movement of the sun, to make him realize that godhead could not be assumed merely by having absolute power over a group of people in a small corner on earth. God, by definition, controls all the affairs of the whole universe, and He is the source of legislation for humanity.

Another familiar daily occurrence is portrayed as a visible proof of God's existence (2:258) and power, even for those who are not familiar with the principles of astronomy or laws of physics. This statement comes as a direct challenge to the basic human nature by expressing a fact that cannot be disputed. God's Revelations often address human nature at various stages of human intellectual, cultural and social development to lead man from wherever he is to a higher state of consciousness. (2:258)

The challenge was real, clear, and unambiguous, and the stubborn king would have been better advised to give in, but his pride had the better of him and prevented him from submitting to the truth. He could do no more than be astounded and stupefied, thereby forfeiting the opportunity to believe and win God's guidance. (2:258) This encounter, which God cited for His Messenger and his community of followers, remains today an example for obstinacy and ignorance, and a lesson from which they learn how to confront those who deny the truth.

The passage presents two simple but profound truths: one taken from within the human being, that God gives life and causes death, and the other from the natural world around, that God causes the sun to rise in the east, and not in the west. These are familiar occurrences, available for all to see and contemplate, requiring little knowledge or effort to perceive or understand. The human being only needs to allow his inner nature to respond and react to these imposing phenomena, the impact of which cannot be mistaken or escaped, unless

one is being deliberately stubborn or bent on rejecting the truth.

God is too kind to demand His recognition by means that may not be available to all people. Belief in God is an indispensable ingredient of the human being, without which human life would lose all sense of direction and order, and man would have no source of values, legislation or moral standards.

This can be said about all other essential aspects of human life. Human beings seek food, drink, air and procreation by his natural instincts. They do not need to attain certain levels of intellectual or cultural maturity to acquire the right to satisfy these desires. Were they to need these, human beings would perish without moving one step forward. Belief in God, is equally essential to human life, and it is easily attained by responding honestly and naturally to the compelling evidence present throughout the universe and within the very human being and existence.

Abraham and Nimrod

Madinah: *And mention when Abraham said: My Lord!*
*Cause me to see how **You** will give life to the dead.*
*He said: Will **you** not believe?*
He said: Yea, but so my heart be at rest.
He said: Again, take four birds, and twist them to thyself.
Again, lay a part of them on every mountain.
Again, call to them. They will approach thee coming eagerly.
*And know **you** that God is Almighty, Wise.* (2:260)

Commentary°

Then follows another episode, involving the Prophet Abraham and the phenomena of life and death. It is the usual tale of curiosity about the great mystery of life and creation. When this curiosity is expressed by a devoted and pious person like the Prophet Abraham, it proves that there are times when even the most favored and believing of God's servants experience a passionate urge and ambition to discover the secrets of creation.

God responds favorably to Abraham's request and exposes him to a direct personal experience to satisfy his curiosity, giving him the following instructions.

The instructions meant that Abraham should choose four birds and make sure of having them close to him so that he would be able to know every little detail of their appearance so that he could unmistakably identify them at any time. He would then have to kill them and cut them into pieces before placing different parts of their bodies on the surrounding mountains. He would then call them to

come over to him, and their parts will join again, life is breathed into them and they could speedily come to him. All this took place in reality.

Thus Abraham was able to witness the secret of breathing life into the dead unfolding before his own eyes. It is the secret that occurs all the time, but people only see its effects after its process has been completed. It is the greatest mystery of life, which was created in the first instance by God out of nothing, and which renews itself an infinite number of times in every new living thing. Abraham saw with his own eyes the birds he killed and placed portions of their bodies far apart, returned to life and moving in full vigor.

Here curiosity is not motivated by lack of conviction or the demand for proof to confirm one's faith, but has a different flavor, excited by a spiritual yearning to see and share one of God's most fascinating secrets. This privilege, even for someone like Abraham, has a unique honor and a flavor of its own, different even to that of faith itself. It is a natural and spontaneous desire to know and learn how the divine will operates, not in order to believe or obtain proof, but to experience total peace and gain reassurance.

Abraham's experience and the short dialogue that accompanied it reveal several perceptions of faith which the human heart, if it so desires, can experience and enjoy.

Abraham was seeking the reassurance of seeing God's hand at work and the satisfaction of seeing a hidden mystery unfold before him. God was aware that Abraham was a devout believer and that his inquisitiveness had arisen out of the quest for knowledge. The episode also serves to inform and educate and reveal God's compassion and benevolence towards a faithful and curious servant.

How could all this take place? It is the one mystery that continues to elude human perception. Even if one was to undergo Abraham's experience and witness the actual act of creation, one would not comprehend its reality or how it is accomplished. It is the prerogative of God Almighty, of whose perfect and absolute knowledge human beings can acquire nothing, except by His will. It is God's will that this sphere should remain beyond the bounds of human knowledge, possibly because it is beyond human comprehension and is not required for the fulfillment of the human being's mission on earth.

Until God allows the curtain to be raised on this issue, human aspiration to grasp the coveted secret of life shall remain unfulfilled. If, however, he were to persist in his defiance of God's authority and continue to trespass in regions that are the exclusive domain of the Divine, his efforts would forever be in vain and yield nothing.

Abraham Made a Leader and Guide for Humanity

Madinah: *And mention when his Lord tested Abraham*
with words;
then, he fulfilled them. God said:
Truly, I am One Who Makes thee a leader for humanity.
He said: And of my offspring?
He said: Attain not My compact
the ones who are unjust. (2:124)
And mention when We made the House
a place of spiritual reward for humanity
and a place of sanctuary:
And take the Station of Abraham
to yourselves as a place of prayer.
And We made a compact with Abraham,
and Ishmael saying that:
Purify My House for the ones who circumambulate it,
and the ones who cleave to it, and the ones who bow down,
and the ones who prostrate themselves. (2:125)
And mention when Abraham said: My Lord!
Make this a safe land, and provide its people with fruits,
whomever of them believed in God and the Last Day.
God said: And whoever is ungrateful,
I will give him enjoyment for a while.
Again, I will compel him to the punishment of the fire.
And miserable will be the Homecoming! (2:126)
And mention when Abraham elevates the foundations
of the House with Ishmael
saying: Our Lord! Receive it from us.
Truly, ***You****,* ***You*** *alone are The Hearing, The Knowing.* (2:127)
Our Lord! And make us ones who submit to ***You****,*
and, of our offspring,
a community of ones who submit to ***You****.*
And cause us to see our devotional acts,
and turn to us in forgiveness.
Truly, ***You****,* ***You*** *alone are The Accepter of Repentance,*
The Compassionate. (2:128)
Our Lord! And raise ***You*** *up, then, in the midst of them,*
a Messenger from among them
who will recount to them ***Your*** *signs*
and teach them the Book, and wisdom and make them pure.
Truly, ***You****,* ***You*** *alone are The Almighty, The Wise.* (2:129)

The Religion of Abraham is the Correct Religion

And who shrinks from the creed of Abraham,
but he who fooled himself?
And, certainly, We favored him in the present.
And, truly, in the world to come he will be
among the ones in accord with morality. (2:130)
When his Lord said to him: Submit!
He said: I submitted to the Lord of the worlds. (2:131)
And Abraham charged his children to it, and Jacob:
O my children! Truly, God favored the way of life for you.
Then, be not overtaken by death
but you be ones who submit to the One God. (2:132)
Or had you been witnesses when death attended Jacob
when he said to his children: How will you worship after me?
*They said: We will worship **your** God and the God of **your** fathers*
—Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac—One God.
And we are ones who submit to Him. (2:133)
That was, surely, a community that passed away.
For them is what they earned, and for you is what you earned
and you will not be asked
about what they had been doing. (2:134)
*Say **you**: Nay! We follow the creed of Abraham a monotheist.*
And he had not been of the ones who are polytheists. (2:135)
So if they believed the like of what you believed in it,
then, surely, they were truly guided.
And if they turned away, then, they are not but in breach.
So God suffices for you against them.
And He is The Hearing, The Knowing. (2:137)
Life's color is from God.
And who is fairer at coloring than God?
And we are ones who worship Him. (2:138)
Say: Argue you with us about God?
And He is our Lord and your Lord.
And to us are our actions, and to you are your actions.
And we are to Him ones who are sincere and devoted. (2:139)
Or say you about Abraham and Ishmael
and Isaac and Jacob and the Tribes
had been ones who became Jews or were Christians?
Say: Are you greater in knowledge or God?
And who does greater wrong
than he who had been keeping back testimony from God
that is with him, and God is not One Who is Heedless

of what you do. (2:140)
That is a community that has surely passed away.
For it is what it has earned and for you is what you have earned
and you will not be asked
about what they had been doing. (2:141)

Commentary°

When his Lord tested Abraham with certain commandments and he fulfilled them, He said, I have appointed you a leader of humanity. Abraham asked about his descendants? God said that His covenant does not extend to the unjust.

Being human, Abraham is immediately prompted to wish for that blessing and privilege to be extended to his offspring. What Abraham expressed was a natural instinctive human reaction, because the human being is always eager to multiply and perpetuate his achievements and attainments. By the passing of knowledge and experience from one generation to the next, the human lot is improved and life is preserved. This natural and necessary human process has been a target for criticism and attack, while Islam recognizes its importance, and promotes it through its law of inheritance, so that it serves human society to the full.

The answer to Abraham's question reiterates an already stated major principle: that religious leadership and authority are granted purely on merit, in reward for sincere faith and diligent work. They are not inherited through ancestral lineage.

While still pleading for the House to be made a universal place of peace and security for posterity, Abraham has clearly heeded God's earlier admonition, as we now find him making the exception that only the believers should receive God's favor.

The signs then go on to paint a lively picture of Abraham and Ishmael embarking on the job of constructing the House of God and preparing it for worshippers. (2:124-2:140)

The misguided efforts made in some societies to undermine this natural progression in fact try to suppress human nature altogether. Such efforts betray short-sightedness, inhumanity and arbitrary methods in tackling social and moral ills. Unless remedied, these will lead to the fragmentation and destruction of society. However, solutions that run contrary to human nature will inevitably end in failure. What is needed is a solution that rectifies deviation and social ills without contradicting human nature. Such methods can only be adopted and made to work within a framework of divine guidance and faith. They require a profound and enlightened understanding of human nature

and the human mind, and an unbiased outlook, free of all grudges and destructive tendencies.

Injustice it might be directed at oneself, by associating partners with God, or it might be oppression directed at fellow human beings. The leadership denied to wrongdoers includes all the meanings covered by the Arabic term *imam*, which includes political authority and the leading of congregational prayers. Equity and justice make up the foremost qualification for this lofty vocation, and no one who deviates from these qualities deserves any form of leadership, in its widest sense.

Not only does this vivid account take the reader right into the scene of the action, but it also surrounds him with the mood and feeling of the occasion. It was a labor of love and devotion that those two pious people undertook, dedicated to God Almighty and carried out in expectation and hope that He would accept it and be pleased with it.

We almost hear the tone and music of their prayer, and we feel the atmosphere of heart-felt appeal to God. This is a special characteristic of the Quranic style which brings a scene of an event long gone as though it is taking place here and now, right in front of us. In their prayer we cannot fail to note the sort of humility, devotion and profound faith that are worthy of Prophets who understand the importance of true faith in this world. Such characteristics the Quran tries to teach the advocates of faith and instill it in their hearts.

Their first aim is that their labor, which is dedicated purely to God, should be accepted by Him. Therefore, they offer it with humility, hoping to earn God's pleasure through it, pinning their hopes on the fact that God listens to their prayers and knows their feelings and intentions.

They turn to God seeking His guidance, fully aware that, without His help and support, they are powerless. Their prayer also shows the intrinsic solidarity of the community of believers over successive generations. This shows not only the fact that faith is the most important aspect in a believer's life, and appreciation of its great blessings, but also the instinctive natural feeling of wishing the best for one's children and descendants. Their main concern was that their offspring should be God-conscious, righteous and obedient to God. So they add a specific request. We note that some time may elapse before God answers a particular prayer. As human beings, we tend to be impatient and want our prayers answered immediately, forgetting that it is for God Almighty to choose how and when they should be answered and fulfilled.

There can be no room for doubt about God's oneness and sov-

ereignty over all creation. He is the Lord of all of us, and He shall judge everyone by their own deeds. As Muslims, we devote our life and existence totally to God alone. We seek no other beings with or beside Him; and to us, these are incontrovertible and indisputable facts on which the faith of Islam rests.

In terse and forceful language, the verses pose other rhetorical questions regarding the faith of earlier prophets, well known to the Jews and the Christians. (2:140)

God Favored the People of Abraham

Chapter 3: The 89th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *Truly, God favored Adam and Noah and the people of Abraham and the people of Imran above all the worlds,* (3:33)

Friendship with the Enemies of God Forbidden

Chapter 60: The 91st Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *Surely, there had been a fairer, good example*
for you in Abraham
and those with him when they said to their folk:
Truly, we are released from obligation to you
and whatever you worship other than God. We disbelieved in you.
Shown itself between us and between you was enmity
and hatred eternally until you believe in One God,
but for Abraham saying to his father:
Truly, I will ask for forgiveness for ***you***
and I possess not anything for ***you*** *before God. Our Lord!*
In ***You*** *we put our trust and to* ***You*** *we were penitent*
and to ***You*** *is the Homecoming!* (60:4)
Our Lord! Make us not be a cause of their pleasure
for those who were ungrateful and forgive us.
Our Lord; truly, ***You****,* ***You*** *alone*
are The Almighty, The Wise. (60:5)
Certainly there had been a good example in them for you
for those who have been hoping for God
and the Last Day. And whoever turns away,
then truly God, He is Sufficient, Worthy of Praise. (60:6)

Pilgrimage to the Sacred House

Chapter 22: The 103rd Chapter Revealed

Madinah *And mention when We placed Abraham*
in the place of the House that:
You *will ascribe nothing as partners with Me.*
And ***You*** *purify*

My House for the ones who circumambulate it
and the ones who are standing up, and the ones who bow down
and the ones who prostrate themselves. (22:26)

Commentary°

(And (remember) when We prepared for Abraham) when We explained to Abraham (the place of the (holy) House) by means of a cloud which had stopped close to him, and so he built the House by the side whereby the cloud stopped. And We inspired him (saying: Ascribe thou no thing) no idols (as partner unto Me, and purify My House) purify My place of prostration from idols (for those who make the round (thereof) and those who stand) and those who live there (and those who bow and make prostration) the people who pray from all countries and from wherever they happen to come. (22:26)

Abraham was Sympathetic

Chapter 9: The 113th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *And had not been Abraham asking for forgiveness*
for his father only because of a promise he had promised him?
Then, when it became clear to him that, truly,
he was an enemy to God, he cleared himself from him.
Truly, Abraham was sympathetic and forbearing. (9:114)

Ishmael

According to Ibn Ishaq (p 4), Ishmael is buried in the *hijr* of the Kabah next to his mother, Hagar.

And Remember Ishmael

Chapter 38: The 38th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, truly, they are to Us among ones who are favored and good.* (38:47)
And remember Ishmael, Elisha, and Dhul Kifl.
And all are among the good. (38:48)

References to the Other Prominent Messengers of God

Chapter 19: The 44th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And remember Ishmael in the Book.*
Truly, he had been one who is sincere in his promise,
and he had been a Messenger, a Prophet. (19:54)

Commentary°

And mention in the Book Ishmael. Indeed he was true to his promise—he never promised anything which he did not fulfill; he once waited for three days for someone whom he had promised to meet; or it is said that he waited an entire year until that person finally returned to the place in which he Ishmael was supposed to have met the former; and he was a Messenger to the tribe of Jurhum, a Prophet likewise.

Now the [sign] refers to the other branch of Abraham's seed, bringing in Ishmael, the father of the Arabs, for special mention: And mention in the Book Ishmael who was always true to his promise, and was a messenger of God, a prophet. He used to enjoin on his people prayer and charity, and his Lord was well pleased with him. (19:54-19:55)

The [sign] highlights a special quality of Ishmael's, which was his being true to his promise. This is a characteristic common to all prophets and all God-fearing men and women. The fact that it is highlighted here suggests that in Ishmael's case it must have had very special significance. Moreover, Ishmael is given the status of messenger of God, which means that he preached God's message to the Arabs of old. Indeed he was their highest grandfather. We know that even shortly before the advent of the message of the Prophet Muhammad, there were some individual Arabs who believed in one God.

Most probably they were the last remnants of Ishmael's followers.

The [sign] also mentions that the fundamentals of his faith included prayer and the purifying alms or *zakat*, which he ordered his family and his people to observe. Moreover, the [sign] leaves us in no doubt that Ishmael earned God's pleasure, which imparts a sense of contentment and satisfaction to anyone. This contentment is another aspect that permeates the whole chapter, in the same way as mercy. In fact the two aspects of mercy and contentment are mutually related.

The Other Messengers Followed Abraham's Footsteps

Chapter 6: The 55th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And Ishmael and Elisha and Jonah and Lot.*
We gave all an advantage over the worlds. (6:86)

Ishmael's Test

Chapter 37: The 56th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *My Lord! Bestow on me*
among the ones in accord with morality. (37:100)
And We gave him the good tidings
of a forbearing boy. (37:101)
And when he reached maturity
endeavoring with him, he said:
O my son! Truly, I see while slumbering
*that I am sacrificing **you**.*
So look on what thou hast considered?
He said: O my father!
Accomplish whatever thou art commanded.
Thou wilt find me, if God willed,
of the ones who remain steadfast. (37:102)
Then, when they both submitted themselves to God
and he flung him on his brow (37:103)
We cried out to him: O Abraham! (37:104)
*Surely, **you** had established the dream as true.*
Thus, We give recompense
to the ones who are doers of good. (37:105)
Truly, that was, certainly, the clear trial. (37:106)
And, then, We took ransom for him
with a sublime slaughter (37:107)
and We left for him a good name
with the later ones: (37:108)
Peace be on Abraham! (37:109)

My Lord! Bestow on me
of the ones who are in accord with morality. (37:110)
So We gave him the good tidings
of a forbearing son. (37:111)

Commentary°

And when he was old enough to walk with him, that is, to go about with him and help him out — this is said to have been either at the age of seven or at the age of thirteen — he said, 'O my son. . . . — and the visions of Prophets are always true and their actions are inspired by the command of God, exalted be He. *So look on what thou hast considered* . . . of this dream. He consulted him so that he his son might accept the idea of being sacrificed and comply with the command for it. He said, *O my father*. . . (37:102) And when they had both submitted, when they had submitted to and were prepared to comply with God's command, exalted be He, and he had laid him down on his forehead, when he had pushed him down to the ground thereon — every human being has two brows between which is the forehead this was at Mina. Abraham passed the knife across his son's throat but it did not do anything, by some impediment of the Divine Power. . . . (37:103)

God witnessed the sincerity shown by both Abraham and Ishmael, and He considered them to have fulfilled all that was required of them:

God called to him and ransomed [Ishmael] with a noble sacrifice. You have indeed fulfilled all you needed to fulfill. God wants nothing from His servants other than that they submit themselves to Him totally, so that they have nothing which they consider too dear or too precious to give up, not even an only son, or their own lives. You, Abraham, have done this, offering everything dear, with certainty and acceptance. What was left was flesh and blood, which could be substituted by any type of flesh and blood. Thus, God ransomed this young man who had submitted himself to His will by a great and noble sacrifice. It is reported that the sacrifice was a ram that Abraham found ready by God's will and that he sacrificed this ram in place of Ishmael.

Abraham was then told that that is how God rewards the good. We reward them by choosing them for such a test, directing their minds and hearts to rise to the necessary level, helping them in such fulfillment and then giving them the reward they deserve.

It is to commemorate this great event that serves as a symbol of true faith and submission to God that Muslims celebrate the Sacrifice or al-Adha. This event serves as a reference point for the Muslim

community to know their first father, Abraham, whose faith it follows and to whom it traces its ancestry. It thus understands the nature of its faith, based on submission to God's will with perfect acceptance and reassurance. It will never need to ask God why. It will never hesitate to do His bidding, once it realizes what He wants of it. It gives its all, withholding nothing, and choosing no particular way or form of offering. It simply does what He bids it to do. The Muslim community also knows that God does not wish to overburden it with the test, nor put it to hardship. All He needs is that Muslims should be ready to give whatever they are required to give, in full obedience and commitment, without hesitation. Once they prove such complete dedication, He will remove the need for their sacrifice and pain. He will consider that they have fulfilled their duty and reward them for that, replacing their sacrifice and honoring them as He honored their father, Abraham.

He is remembered by one generation after another. (37:108) He is the father of all prophets, and the founding father of the Muslim community that inherits his faith. God has assigned to the Muslim community the task of leading humanity on the basis of Abraham's faith. In so doing, God has made the Muslim community Abraham's descendants for the rest of human life.

The Great Sacrifice

The chapter moves on to the second episode it relates of Abraham's history. After he was saved from the fire, he closed that chapter of his life to begin a new phase: "And Abraham said I will go to my Lord: He is sure to guide me." (Verse 99) His words indicate that he was migrating, this in both a mental and physical sense. He was abandoning everything: his father, family, home, people and land, leaving them all behind and going to his Lord, free of all concerns. He thus surrendered himself to his Lord, assured that He would give him guidance and care, setting him on the right path. It is a migration from one state to another, abandoning all ties and bonds in favor of one bond that remains pure and strong. His words express complete faith and unqualified surrender.

Until that moment, Abraham was without children. He had left behind his relations, friends and all that was familiar to him. Needless to say, his relations with those who threw him in the fire suffered a final breakdown. Therefore, he went to his Lord, praying to Him to grant him believing offspring: "Lord! Grant me a righteous son." (Verse 100) And God answered his true servant's prayer: "We gave him the happy news that he will have a forbearing son." (37:101) The son was most probably Ishmael, as clearly inferred from his life

story and from the chapter itself. Indeed, we can see the mark of his forbearance in his youth. We can also imagine the delight experienced by Abraham in his new abode, where he was a stranger, at the birth of this son described by God as a 'forbearing son.'

It is time for us now to look at the glorious attitude that Abraham's life story represents, drawing from it an inspiring lesson as presented by God Almighty to the Muslim community.

When the boy was old enough to work with his father, Abraham said: My son! I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice you. Tell me, then, what you think.' [Ishmael] said My father.! Do as you are bidden, and, God willing, you will find me to be patient in adversity.' (37:102)

What effect will faith not produce? We see here Abraham in his old age, cut off in a foreign land, having deserted his homeland and his people, being given a child. The child turns out to be a model son, with his forbearance confirmed by God Himself. Hardly had Abraham enjoyed his son's company and seen his youth blooming so as to become his companion and assistant, when he sees in his dream that he should slaughter him. He understands that it is a sign from God requiring sacrifice. What is his attitude now? He does not hesitate for a moment. The thought of disobedience does not even occur to him. He thinks only of submission. It is true that the dream was only a signal, not a clear and direct order issued through revelation. It was a signal by his Lord though, and that was enough for Abraham to comply, not to delay, and not even to ask why.

Moreover, his compliance did not betray any feeling of distress, horror or panic; it was marked by calm acceptance and reassurance, reflected in his words as he put this most grave matter to his son: "My son! I have seen in a dream that I must sacrifice you. Tell me, then, what you think." (Verse 102) These are the words of a man in full control of himself and his feelings, knowing that he is only doing his duty and trusting that it behooves him to comply. We do not see any element of panic driving a person to do even what he feels to be repugnant, in order to get it done and finished with.

That it was hard for Abraham is beyond doubt. He was not required to send his only son to war, nor to put him to a task that would end in his death. Nothing of the sort. Instead he was required to undertake the task himself, by his own hand. And what task was that? It was to slaughter his own son by way of sacrifice. This was the order he received calmly, the one that he put to his son and asked him to consider carefully. He did not take his son by surprise and do what was bidden. Rather, he puts the question to him as if it were both normal and familiar. To Abraham, the question was one of obe-

dience. Since his Lord wanted something, so be it, without hesitation. His son should also know and accept it willingly, with submission so that he too would earn the reward of obeying God and experience the pleasure of submission to Him. He himself had known that pleasure and now wants his son to feel it as the pure goodness that surpasses all else that life can offer.

What does the son say as his father proposes to slaughter him in fulfillment of what he saw in a dream? The son also rises to the sublime standard his father had earlier attained: "He said: My father! Do as you are bidden, and, God willing, you will find me to be patient in adversity." (37:102) This is not a response of mere obedience and resignation. It is a response marked with acceptance and certainty. His reply begins with, 'My father!' The prospect of his death does not cause him to panic or to forget his manners and love of his father. "Do as you are bidden." He also feels the same as his father, taking the dream as a signal, which means an order. This is sufficient to make him willing to carry it out without hesitation.

Furthermore, we see in Ishmael's response proper manners with his Lord, and recognition of the limits of his ability in the face of hardship. Therefore, he seeks his Lord's help to overcome his weakness. He attributes to God the grace of helping him to obey and make the sacrifice: "God willing, you will find me to be patient in adversity." (37:102) He does not press the matter as a heroic act on his part. Nor does he describe it as facing the danger and caring little for the consequences. He does not give himself any credit in the matter; he simply attributes it all to God who has helped him in carrying out His orders with patience in adversity. This is an example of perfect humility before God, trust in Him, combined with complete obedience and submission to His will.

The scene moves further to show us the order being carried out: "When the two of them had surrendered themselves to the will of God, and Abraham laid him prostrate on his forehead." (37: 103) Once more, obedience, faith and acceptance of God's will rise to a far nobler standard than anything known to humanity. The father puts his son prostrate before him and the son submits and shows no resistance. All this takes place in reality. Such is self surrender, which is the essence of Islam: complete trust, obedience, certainty, acceptance, submission and action. Both father and son experience nothing other than pure faith.

The point here is not one of bravery, courage, enthusiasm or heroic action which a warrior might feel in battle. A committed fighter may undertake a task knowing that his chance of survival is negligible. However, this is totally different from what Abraham and

Ishmael were doing: for them, there is no boiling situation, no rush of enthusiasm prompting hasty action before weakness or hesitation can creep in. Theirs is a rational self surrender, with full knowledge of what they want, and complete reassurance about what will take place. More than that, they coolly appreciate the pleasure of obeying God's orders.

At this stage, Abraham and Ishmael have done all that is required of them. They have submitted themselves and carried out the order. All that remained was the actual shedding of Ishmael's blood and his death, which, in God's scales, counted for little, compared with the energy, feelings and determination both father and son put into what was bidden of them. By this time, the test had reached its climax, its results were known and its objectives fulfilled. What remained was physical pain and a dead body, but God does not want His servants to endure suffering. He does not require them to torment or kill themselves. Once they have submitted themselves and shown their true willingness to do what He bids, then they have fulfilled what is required and passed the test successfully.

Abraham's Prayer of Gratitude for Ishmael and Isaac

Chapter 14: The 72nd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *The Praise belongs to God Who bestowed on me in my old age Ishmael and Isaac. And, truly, my Lord is Hearing the supplication.* (14:39

Commentary°

Praise be to God Who has given me, despite my old age, Ishmael — born to him when he Abraham] was 99 years old—and Isaac—born to him when he was 112 years old. Lo! my Lord is indeed the Hearer of supplication.

Chapter 21: The 73rd Chapter Revealed

And Ishmael and Enoch and Dhul-Kifl, all were of the ones who remain steadfast. (21:85)
And We caused them to enter into Our mercy. They are the ones in accord with morality. (21:86)

Say You About Ishmael

Chapter 2: The 73rd Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *Or say you about Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob and the Tribes had been ones who became Jews or were Christians?*

Say: Are you greater in knowledge or God?
And who does greater wrong than he
who had been keeping back testimony
from God that is with him,
and God is not One Who is Heedless
of what you do. (2:140)

Commentary°

And Ishmael, son of Abraham, and Elisha, and Jonah and Lot, son of Haran, brother of Abraham, all, of them, We preferred above all the worlds, through prophethood.

Isaac

Chapter 12: The 53rd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And I followed the creed of my fathers,*
Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.
It had not been for us that we ascribe
anything as partners with God.
That is from the grace of God to us and to humanity,
except most of humanity gives not thanks. (12:38)

Commentary°

And I follow the creed of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. It never was, right, for us to associate anything with God—on account of our God-given immunity from error. That, affirmation of God's Oneness, is from God's bounty to us and to humanity; but most people—and these are the ungrateful—do not give thanks to God and so they associate others with Him.

Makkah: *And We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob.*
Each of them We guided.
And Noah We guided before and among his offspring
are David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron.
And, thus, We gave recompense
to the ones who are doers of good. (6:84)

Isaac a Prophet

Chapter 37: The 56th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And We gave him the good tidings*
of Isaac, a Prophet,
among the ones in accord with morality. (37:112)
And We blessed him and Isaac.
And of their offspring are ones who are doers of good
and ones who are clearly unjust to themselves. (37:113)

Commentary°

God's grace is bestowed once more on Abraham, as He gave him Isaac in his old age. He further blesses him and his son, making Isaac a Prophet. Their offspring goes on through generations, but its main criterion is not the relation of blood, but the relation of faith and a code of living: whoever follows in their footsteps does-good, and whoever deviates wrongs himself and cannot benefit from this blood relation.

Say You About Isaac

Chapter 2: The 87th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *Or say you about Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac and*
Jacob and the Tribes had been ones
who became Jews or were Christians?
Say: Are you greater in knowledge or God?
And who does greater wrong than he who had been keeping back
testimony from God that is with him,
and God is not One Who is Heedless of what you do. (2:140)

Lot

Chapter 50: The 34th Chapter Revealed

and Ad and Pharaoh and the brothers of Lot, (50:13)

Lot's People Punished

Chapter 54: The 37th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *The folk of Lot denied the warning.* (54:33)
Truly, We sent against them a sand storm, but the family of Lot.
We delivered them at the breaking of day (54:34)
as a divine blessing from Us.
Thus, We gave recompense to him who gave thanks. (54:35)
And, certainly, he warned them of Our attack
but they quarreled over the warning. (54:36)
And, certainly, they solicited his guests,
so We obliterated their eyes.
Then, experience My punishment and My warning. (54:37)
And, certainly, it came in the morning,
early morning at dawn, a settled punishment. (54:38)
Then, experience My punishment
and My warning. (54:39)

Commentary°

The people of Lot denied the warnings, they denied those issues of which they were warned by his Lot's tongue. Indeed We unleashed upon them a squall of pebbles, a wind hurling at them pebbles, namely, small stones, a single one of these being no larger than the palm of the hand, and they were destroyed; all except the family of Lot, namely, his two daughters (Zaura and Raytha), together with him, whom We delivered at dawn, from among the dawns, the morning time of an unspecified. So was the squall unleashed at first with the family of Lot still there? There are two opinions regarding this: in the case of the former that it was unleashed upon them including the family of Lot, the exception is understood as a continuous one.

The Folk of Lot Denied the Warning

Chapter 7: The 39th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And mention Lot, when he said to his folk:*
You approach indecency
as preceded you not anyone therein in the worlds? (7:80)
Truly, you, you approach men with lust instead of women?
Nay! You are a folk, ones who are excessive. (7:81)
And the answer of his folk had not been but that they said:

Bring them out from your town.
Truly, they are a clan to cleanse themselves. (7:82)
Then, We rescued him and his people, but his woman.
She had been among the ones who stay behind. (7:83)
And We rained down a rain on them.
So look on how had been the Ultimate End
of the ones who sin. (7:84)

Commentary°

(And Lot!) and We sent Lot to his people. (When he said unto his folk: Will ye commit abomination) i.e. sodomy (such as no creature ever did) this act (before you?)

The Message of Lot

Chapter 11: The 52nd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *They said: Fear not. We were sent to*
the folk of Lot. (11:70)

Commentary°

When the angels knew of his fear. (They said: Fear not!) O Abraham. (Lo! we are sent unto the folk of Lot) to destroy them.

Messengers Drew Near to Lot

And when Our messengers drew near Lot,
he was troubled for them and was concerned for them,
being distressed.
And he said: This is a distressful day! (11:77)
Then, drew near his folk, running toward him
because they had been doing evil deeds before.
He said: O my folk! These are my daughters!
so be God-conscious.
And cover me not with shame as regards my guests.
Is there not among you a well-intentioned man? (11:78)
They said: Certainly, you had known
we have no right to your daughters.
And, truly, you have known well what we want. (11:79)
He said: Would that I had strength against you
or take shelter with stauncher support! (11:80)
They said: O Lot! Truly, we are Messengers of your Lord.
They will not reach out to you
so set you forth with your people
in a part of the night
and let not any of you look back,

but your woman.
Truly, that which lights on them will light on her.
Truly, what is promised to them is in the morning.
Is the morning not near? (11:81
So when Our command drew near,
We made its high part low
and We rained down on it rocks of baked clay,
one upon another, (11:82)
ones that are distinguished, and not far
from the ones who are unjust. (11:83)

Lot Admonishes His People

Chapter 26: The 47th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *The folk of Lot denied*
the ones who are sent (26:160)
when their brother, Lot, said to them:
Will you not be God-conscious? (26:161)
They said: If you have not refrained yourself, O Lot,
Truly, I am a trustworthy Messenger to you (20:162)
so be God-conscious and obey me. (20:163)
And I ask you not for any compensation for it. My compensation is
only from the Lord of the worlds. (20:164)
You approach males among worldly beings (20:165)
forsaking spouses whom your Lord created for you?
Nay! You are a folk ones who turn away. (20:166)
you will, certainly, be among ones who are driven out. (26:167)

Commentary°

(They said: If thou cease not, O Lot) from what you say, (you wilt soon be of the outcast) you will be expelled from our land, Sodom.

Drive Out the People of Lot

Chapter 27: The 48th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And Lot, when he said to his folk:*
You approach indecency
and you perceive what you do. (27:54)
Why approach you men with lust instead of women?
Nay! You are a folk who are ignorant. (27:55)
Then, there had been no answer by his folk,
but that they said: Drive the people of Lot out from your town.
Truly, they are a clan to cleanse themselves. (27:56)
So We rescued him and his people, but his woman.

We ordained her to be among the ones who stay behind. (27:57)

Commentary°

Since mating is basic for reproduction, God has made mutual attraction between the opposite sexes part of the essence of nature, which needs no acquisition or development through education or thought: it is pure instinct. This ensures that life continues naturally, because those who are alive find their pleasure in the fulfillment of their nature. Thus the divine will accomplishes its design through the natural satisfaction of creatures' instinctive desires. God made male and female genitals, and instilled mutual attraction between the two sexes, so that they find their natural pleasure in being together. He made no such possibility in two males coming together. Therefore, it is most odd that the natural inclinations of a whole community should become so perverted and without any compelling need pushing people to do what is contrary to their natural inclinations, as was the case with Lot's people.

The Family of Lot

Chapter 15: The 54th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: ... *but the family of Lot.*
Truly, we are ones who will deliver them one and all, (15:59)
but his woman. We ordained that she be
of the ones who stay behind. (15:60)

Lot's People Warned

Makkah: *Then, when the ones who are sent*
drew near the people of Lot, (15:61)
he said: Truly, you are folk, ones unlawful to me. (15:62)
They said: Nay! We drew near you with what
they had been contesting in it. (15:63)
We approached you with The Truth and, truly,
we are ones who are sincere. (15:64)
Then, set forth with your family in a part of the night
and follow you their backs and look not back any of you,
but pass on to where you are commanded. (15:65)
And We decreed the command to him that
the last remnant of these would be that which is
severed, in that which is morning. (15:66)
The people of the city drew near rejoicing
at the good tidings. (15:67)
Lot said: Truly, these are my guests,
so put me not to shame. (15:68)

Be God-conscious and cover me not with shame. (15:69)
They said: Prohibit we thee not from some beings? (15:70)
Lot said: These are my daughters
if you had been ones who do something. (15:71)
By thy life, truly, they were in a daze,
wandering unwilling to see. (15:72)
So the Cry took them at sunrise. (15:73)
And We made its high part low
and We rained down on them rocks of baked clay. (15:74)
Truly, in this are signs for the ones who read marks. (15:75)
And, truly, they are ones who are on an abiding way. (15:76)
Truly, in it is a sign for the ones who believe. (15:77)

Commentary°

And when the Messengers [of God] came to the house of Lot, he said: You are unknown here. They answered: No, but we bring you news of that over which they have been disputing. We are bringing you the certainty [of its fulfillment], for we are speaking the truth indeed. Depart with your household in the dead of night, with yourself following them in the rear. Let none of you look back, but proceed to where you are commanded.' And We made plain the case to him, that the last remnant of those [wrongdoers] will be wiped out by the morning. (15:61-15:66)

As indicated earlier, the chapter states that the angels immediately reveal their true identity to Lot and that they have come to accomplish what his people disputed about their punishment for their misdeeds. That punishment comes in fulfillment of God's warnings, confirming the fact that when angels are sent to a community, their punishment is immediate.

He said this (15:62) in irritation, as he was fully aware of the habits of his people and expected what they would try to do with his guests. He was a stranger among his people, and they were arrogant in their immorality. Therefore, he tells his guests that it is unwise of them to come to a city when the reputation of its people is well known.

All these assertions serve to tell us the extent of Lot's alarm and distress, as he wants to be hospitable yet also protect his guests against the designs of his people. Therefore, they reassure him time after time, before giving him his instructions. Thus Lot was to leave the town by night, before the break of dawn. He was to walk behind those who would be saved with him to make sure that no one was left behind, and no one looked behind, like displaced people unwilling to leave their homeland.

It is God, then, who has revealed to Lot this very serious piece of news, which is expressed in the Quran as the last one of those people would be destroyed by the morning. Well, if the last of them is destroyed, it follows that the whole lot are destroyed, with none spared. Therefore, caution must be exercised, so that no one is left behind to suffer the fate that was sure to engulf the whole city.

The [signs] relate this part of the story, first, because it is more suited to its overall theme. It now fills in the details of what happened earlier when Lot's people heard that a number of handsome young men were visiting him. To them, that was a chance not to be missed.

The way this is expressed portrays to what low and abhorrent level those people had sunk in their eagerness to fulfill their uncontrolled desires. This is shown in the fact that the townsfolk came in a group, rejoicing at the presence of young men, openly declaring their intent to rape them in broad daylight. This shameful publicity of their wicked intentions, in addition to the action itself, is so abhorrent and repulsive that we cannot imagine it, but it was certainly true. An individual may harbor some desire, but he conceals the fact and tries to satisfy his perversion in secret. He is ashamed if others know of it. In fact, sound human nature prefers to keep such desire private even when it is with one's legitimate wife. Some animal species do not mate in public. But those people declare their lust shamelessly, come seeking it in groups, and rejoice as they expect to fulfill it.

On the other side we see the Prophet Lot in distress, standing up to defend his guests and his honor. He tries to awaken in his people a sense of honor and fear of God. But he knew full well that they had no fear of God, and that such perverted natures would not respond to any compassionate, humanitarian appeal. Yet in his distress he tries every avenue. But his appeal awakens no feeling of honor or integrity. They had lost all such feelings. Instead, they rebuke Lot for entertaining any man as a guest, as if he is the offender by offering them the temptation.

Lot continues with his attempts, pointing out the proper line of desire, i.e. the other sex. It is women who hold natural attraction for men to satisfy their sexual urge, so that procreation continues and human life is preserved.

Lot, a Prophet, does not offer his daughters in any adulterous relationship. He simply reminds the folk of the natural way to satisfy their urge. He knew that if they responded to his appeal they would not want to be adulterous. Hence, his offer sought recourse to their human nature, if only it would respond. But that was unlikely.

The [signs] portray the scene with all the action taking place. At

this moment, the mode of expression changes into an address to the Prophet who is observing it all. This takes the form of an oath, following the traditional method of Arabic emphasis. (15:72) This describes a state that had become part of their nature. In that state they were unlikely ever to wake up or listen to appeals based on personal integrity, fear of God or uncorrupted human nature. Therefore, they were doomed and God's punishment was to engulf them without delay.

Now we face a scene of total destruction, two towns in complete ruin with particular features that are suited to the perverted natures of their dwellers.

Lot Sent to Warn His Folk

Chapter 37: The 56th Chapter Revealed

Makkah *And, truly, Lot*
was of the ones who are sent. (37:133)
We delivered him and his people, one and all, (37:134)
but an old woman of the ones who stay behind. (37:135)
Again, We destroyed the others. (37:136)
And, truly, you pass by them in that which is morning (37:137)
and at night. Will you not, then, be reasonable? (37:138)

Lot

Chapter 29: The 85th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *So Lot believed in him.*
And Abraham said.
Truly, I am one who emigrates for my Lord.
Truly, He, He is The Almighty, The Wise. (29:26)

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And Lot, when he said to his folk:
Truly, you approach indecency
which none who preceded you committed in the worlds. (29:28)
You approach men with lust and sever the way
and approach that which is unlawful in your conclave.
Then, the answer of his folk had not been
but that they said: Bring on us the punishment of God
if you had been among the ones who are sincere. (29:29)
He said: My Lord! Help me against the folk,
ones who make corruption. (29:30)
And when Our messengers drew near Abraham
with the good tidings.
They said: Truly, We are ones who will cause
to perish the people of this town.

Truly, its people had been ones who are unjust. (29:31)
He said: Truly, in it is Lot.
They said: We are greater in knowledge of who is in it.
We will, truly, deliver him and his family, (29:32)
And when Our messengers drew near Lot,
he was troubled because of them
and he was concerned for them, distressed,
and they said: Neither fear nor feel remorse.
Truly, we are ones who will deliver ***you*** *and thy family*
but ***your*** *woman.*
She had been among the ones who stay behind. (29:33)
Truly, we are ones who will cause to descend
on the people of this town
wrath from heaven
because they had been disobeying. (29:34)
And, certainly, We left in it a sign, clear portents
for a folk who be reasonable. (29:35)

Commentary°

Lot's story is mentioned next, after he had emigrated with Abraham and settled in the Jordan Valley. Lot then lived on his own with a tribe close to the Dead Sea, which was later called Lake Lot. The township where the tribe lived was known as Sodom. Lot married one of their women and lived among them.

A certain type of perversion had spread among those people, and the Quran mentions that homosexuality had occurred. In the natural state of things a man is attracted to a woman so that the two form a natural productive unit that ensures the continuity of life through procreation, which is common to all living species. It is God who has created them all in pairs made of males and females. Thus, Lot's people were the first ever to yield to such perversion:

Although it is clear from Lot's address to his people that other types of corruption had spread among them, their main abomination was that they engaged in sex with other men.

Lot's people assaulted travelers on the highways, looting their property. They also raped men, which is an even worse act than their other perversion. Furthermore, they spread corruption in the land, and committed shameful acts in their meeting places. When a community find it acceptable to boast of what is indecent, its moral degeneration has become grave indeed. Thus, there was no hope that they would reform themselves.

The story is given here in a concise manner. It appears that Lot first counseled them gently, telling them to stop their practices, but

they were persistent. He then warned them of God's punishment and spoke clearly about the abomination of what they did.

At this point the curtains fall. When they rise again, the scene depicts God's response. The [signs] move to a third scene in which we see Lot as he received the angels who took the guise of handsome young men. Aware of his people's perversion, he feared for his guests knowing that he could not be of much help to them. He was distressed at their presence at such a difficult time. As told in [these signs], the story does not mention how Lot's people tried to abuse his guests, his remonstrations with them and their paying no heed. It moves straight on to the final outcome with the angels telling him in his overwhelming distress who they were and what their mission was:

This last verse draws an image of the total destruction which was visited on the town and its population, with the exception of Lot and the believers in his household. This destruction was visited upon by means of rain and stones covered with mud.

The remains of this destruction were left for all to see, telling of God's signs and serving as a reminder to anyone who has reason to think and reflect. This was the natural fate of this evil shoot that had rotted and molded so badly that it could no longer yield any fruit. The only thing to do with it was fell it.

Jacob

Jacob's Inner Self Satisfied

Chapter 12: The 53rd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And I followed the creed of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. It had not been for us that we ascribe anything as partners with God. That is from the grace of God to us and to humanity, except most of humanity gives not thanks.* (12:38)

Commentary°

God, exalted be He, says: And when they entered in the manner which their father had bidden them, that is, separately, it did not avail them anything against God, that is, against His decree; it was but a need in Jacob's soul which he thus satisfied, and this need was his desire to fend off the evil eye from them, out of affection for them. And verily he was possessed of knowledge, because We had taught him; but most of humanity—and they are the ungrateful—do not know, about God's inspiring His elect.

Messengers Followed in Abraham's Footsteps

Chapter 6: The 55th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob. Each of them We guided. And Noah We guided before and among his offspring are David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron. And, thus, We gave recompense to the ones who are doers of good.* (6:84)

Jacob Bequeaths His Message to His Children

Chapter 2: The 87th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *And Abraham charged his children to it, and Jacob:*
O my children! Truly, God favored the way of life for you. Then, be not overtaken by death but you be ones who submit to the One God. (2:132)
*Or had you been witnesses when death attended Jacob when he said to his children: How will you worship after me? They said: We will worship **your** God and the God of **your** fathers —Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac—One God. And we are ones who submit to Him.* (2:133)
That was, surely, a community that passed away.

For them is what they earned, and for you is what you earned
and you will not be asked
about what they had been doing. (2:134)

*****

Or say you about Abraham and Ishmael and Isaac
and Jacob and the Tribes had been ones who became Jews
or were Christians? Say: Are you greater in knowledge or God?
And who does greater wrong
than he who had been keeping back testimony from God
that is with him, and God is not One Who is Heedless
of what you do. (2:140)

Commentary°

At this point we come to witness another awesome scene: Jacob on his deathbed, giving his last words of wisdom and advice to his children, gathered around him.

It is indeed a tremendous and solemn occasion. The most important and only issue that concerned Jacob as he drew his last breath was the religion his children were to follow after his death. He was worried about the fate of his legacy and the future of the religion placed in his trust. His children's reply must have been most reassuring and gratifying for him. The chain would not be broken, and the legacy of Abraham was sure to live on for many generations to come.

Jacob asks his children who they will worship after he dies. He thus tells them why he gathered them, and the issue he wanted to be sure of before his death. It is the trust and the heritage of that blessed house. His children reassure Jacob that they would be true to their trust. Thus, the same heritage of Abraham was safe with Jacob's children, who clearly state that they have submitted themselves to God.

. . .

Joseph

Joseph' Dream and Jacob's Advice

Chapter 12: The 53rd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Mention when Joseph said to his father:*
O my father! Truly, I saw eleven stars and the sun and the moon.
I saw them as ones prostrating themselves to me. (12:4)
*He said: O my son! Relate not **your** dream to **your** brothers*
*so that they contrive cunning against **you**.*
Truly, Satan is a clear enemy to the human being. (12:5)
*And, thus, **your** Lord will elect **you***
*and teach **you** of the interpretation of events.*
*And He will fulfill His divine blessing on **you***
and on the people of Jacob just as He fulfilled it
*on **your** two fathers before, Abraham and Isaac.*
*Truly, **your** Lord is Knowing, Wise.* (12:6)

Commentary°

Joseph's father was Jacob who was the son of Isaac who was the son of Abraham.

Jacob understood from Joseph's vision that God would choose him out for his prophethood and would raise him up above his brothers and therefore he feared on Joseph's account their envy and hatred.

Joseph Suffers the Treatment of his Brothers

Madinah: *Certainly, there had been in Joseph and his brothers*
signs for the ones who ask. (12:7)
Makkah: *When they said: Certainly, Joseph and his brother*
are more beloved to our father than we, although we are many.
Truly, our father is clearly wandering astray. (12:8)
Kill Joseph or fling him to some other region
to free the face of your father for you.
You be a folk after that ones in accord with morality! (12:9)
Said one who says: Kill not Joseph,
but cast him into the bottom of a well.
Some company of travelers will pick him out,
if you had been ones who do this. (12:10)
They said: O our father!
*Why will **you** not entrust us with Joseph*
when we are, truly,
ones who will, certainly, look after him? (12:11)
Send him with us tomorrow to frolic and play.

And, truly, we are ones who guard him. (12:12)
He said: Truly, it disheartens me that you go with him.
And I fear that a wolf eat him
while you are ones who are heedless of him. (12:13)
They said: If a wolf ate him while we are many,
truly, then, we are ones who are losers. (12:14)
So they went with him,
and they agreed to lay him in the bottom of the well.
And We revealed to him:
Certainly, you will tell them of this, their affair,
when they are not aware. (12:15)
And they drew near their father in the time of night,
weeping. (12:16)
They said: O our father!
Truly, we went racing
and we left Joseph with our sustenance
and a wolf ate him and you will not be one who believes us,
even if we had been ones who are sincere. (12:17)
And they brought about his long shirt with false blood.
He said: Nay! Your souls enticed you with a command.
Having patience is graceful.
And it is God, One Whose Help is being sought
against what you allege. (12:18)
And there drew near a company of travelers
so they sent their water-drawer to let down his bucke
He said: What good tidings! This is a bo
So they kept him secret as merchandise
And God is Knowing of what they do. (12:19)
And they sold him for a meager price of coins,
ones that are numbered.
And they had been of him
among the ones who hold him in low esteem. (12:20)

Commentary°

A dream is angelic narratives if it is true, and human or satanic ones if false. His brother, means Benjamin. Joseph and Benjamin were full brothers, their mother being Rachel. (12:8) There is a tradition that Joseph was dearer to Jacob because of the signs that Jacob saw in him and his brothers envied him; so when Joseph had seen the vision, Jacob's love for him increased to such an extent the he could not bear to be parted from him, and their envy was intensified until it impelled them to make an attempt on him. (12:8)

The well in question was that of Jerusalem, or a well in the land

of Jordan, or one between Egypt and Midian, or one three leagues from Jacob's dwelling ... for it is related that when they got out with him into the desert they began hurting and beating him until they well-nigh killed him, and he began crying out and calling or help, and Judah said: Did you not covenant with me that you would not kill him? So they took him to the well and lowered him down into it, and since he clung on to the lip of the well, they tied his hands; and they stripped off his shirt in order to smear it with blood and therewith practice a deceit on his father.

When he was half-way down, they let him go. There was water in the well, and he sank down, but then scrambled onto a rock that was there, and stood on it weeping. But Gabriel brought him an inspiration as is stated in the following words: You will surely tell them what they did to you. Joseph was seventeen years old; or according to other accounts, just approaching puberty, and had been receiving inspiration during his boyhood as was the case with John (Yahya) and Jesus. There is a legend that when Abraham was thrown into the fire, he was stripped of his clothes, but Gabriel brought him a shirt of paradise-silk and put it on him. Abraham handed this on to Isaac, and Isaac to Jacob, who put it into an amulet that he hung on Joseph, and Gabriel brought it out and clothes Joseph with it. (12:15)

Joseph's Firmness in Piety Against the Great Temptation

Makkah: *One from Egypt who bought him*
said to his woman:
Honor him as a guest with a place of lodging.
Perhaps he will profit us or we will take him to ourselves as a son.
And, thus, We established Joseph firmly in the earth
that We teach him the interpretation of events.
God is One Who is Victor over His command,
except most of humanity knows not. (12:21)
And when he had fully grown and come of age,
We gave him critical judgment and knowledge.
And, thus, We give recompense
to the ones who are doers of good. (12:22)
And she in whose house he was solicited him,
enticing him to evil.
And she shut the doors and said:
Come you! He said: God be my safe place.
Truly, he, your husband, is my master
and He gave me a goodly place of lodging.

Truly, the ones who are unjust will not prosper. (12:23)
She, certainly, was about to act on her desire for him
and he was about to act on his desire for her,
if it were not that he saw proof of his Lord.
Thus, it was that We turn away from him evil and depravity.
And, truly, he was among Our servants,
ones who are devoted. (12:24)
So they raced to the door and she tore his long shirt from behind.
And they both discovered her chief at the door.
She said: What is the recompense of him
*who wanted evil for **your** household,*
but that he be imprisoned or a painful punishment? (12:25)
He said: She solicited me, enticing me to evil.
And one who bears witness bore witness from her household
and said: If his long shirt had been torn from the front,
then, she was sincere,
and he was among the ones who lie. (12:26)
But if his long shirt had been torn from behind,
she lied against herself;
he was among ones who are sincere. (12:27)
When her husband saw his long shirt was torn from behind,
he said: It is of your (f) cunning;
truly, your (f) cunning is serious. (12:28)
Joseph! Turn aside from this!
*To his wife he said: Ask **you** for forgiveness for **your** (f) impiety;*
*truly, **you** (f) had been of the ones who are inequitable.* (12:29)

Commentary°

al-Aziz bought him from the travelers. al-Aziz was in charge of the treasuries of Egypt and his name was Qitfir or Itfir. The king at that time was Rayyan ibn al-Walid, the Amalekite. He believed in Joseph and died during Joseph's life. According to another account he was the Pharaoh of Moses and lived 400 years; this is based on the Quranic statement about Moses' Pharaoh: Joseph came to you previously with clear signs. (40:36) The commonly accepted view is that Moses' Pharaoh was one of the descendants of Joseph's Pharaoh and that the [sign] just cited is an example of descendants being addressed in terms appropriate to their ancestors; circumstances. It is related that al-Aziz bought Joseph when the latter was seventeen years old, and he stayed in his house thirteen years, and Rayyan made him his vizier at the age of thirty-three, and he died at the age of 120. Various opinions are held about the price for which he bought Joseph, by those who hold his sale on this occasion to be different from the

earlier sale; some say it was twenty dinars and two pairs of sandals and two white robes, others that it was his bulk in gold or alternatively in silver.

Qitfir was childless. He detected probity in Joseph. It is said that three people showed themselves pre-eminently skilled in judging men: Aziz of Egypt, Jethro's daughter and Joseph. (12:21)

The age of maturity between thirty and forty; or, according to others, the age of adolescence which begins with the attainment of puberty "wisdom" which is knowledge backed up by action; or, "authority" among humanity. (12:22)

God put the testifying into the mount of one of her family in order that it might be more binding on her. Because this would prove that she had torn his shirt at the front in self-defense; or alternatively that he had hurried after her and stumbled over the hem of the shirt so that the breast of it tore. (12:26)

Because this would prove that she had followed him and grasped at his garment and torn it. (12:27)

There were five of the women, the wives of the chamberlain, butler, baker, prison-keeper and head groom.

Joseph Prefers Prison to the Sinful Enjoyment of Life

Makkah: *And the ladies in the city said:*
The woman of the great one solicits her spiritual warrior,
enticing him to evil.
Surely, he captivated her longing.
Truly, we consider her to be clearly wandering astray. (12:30)
So when she heard of their planning,
she sent for them (f), and made ready for them a banquet.
And she gave each one of them (f) a knife,
and said to Joseph: Go forth before them (f).
Then, when they saw him, they admired him
and cut their hands.
And they (f) said: God save us! This is not a mortal.
This is nothing but a generous angel! (12:31)
She said: This is he about whom you (f) blamed me.
And, certainly, I solicited him,
enticing him to evil,
but he preserved himself from sin.
And now if he accomplishes not what I command,
he will, certainly, be imprisoned
and will be among the ones who are disgraced. (12:32)

He said: O my Lord! Prison is more beloved to me
than what they call me to.
Unless You have turned away their (f) cunning from me,
I will yearn towards them (f)
and I will be among the ones who are ignorant. (12:33)
So his Lord responded to him
and turned away their (f) cunning from him.
Truly, He, He is The Hearing, The Knowing. (12:34)
Again, it showed itself to them.
And after they saw the signs,
it seemed that they should imprison him for a while. (12:35)

Commentary°

He has called it 'cunning' because they concealed it as a cunning person normally conceals his wife; or alternatively because they said it with the object of her showing Joseph to them; or because she had asked them to keep her secret hidden, but they spread it abroad against her.

It is said that she invited forty women, including the five. In order that they might recline with the knives in their hands, there were cushions and when Joseph came out to them they would be astonished and forget themselves, so that their hands, holding their knives would fall on each other's hands and cut them, and they would stand rebuked by this proof of the irresistible nature of Joseph's charms; or else Joseph would be alarmed at her guild when he came out alone before forty women with knives in their hands. They though him marvelous and were awed at his superlative beauty.

Zulaykha confesses to them her guilty conduct now that she realizes that they pardon her as shown by their exclamation he is an angel,' in order that they may assist her in softening his attitude. (12:32)

In view of the outcome in the future life, even in a case where the latter is what one's natural spirit desires and the former is what it hates. The verb 'invite' has 'them' collectively as subject because they tried to intimidate him out of opposing her wishes, and to make obedience to her attractive to him. Or alternatively they invited him to themselves. It is said that he was subjected by God to the trial of imprisonment because of his saying this, for it would have been more proper for him to ask God for safety from trials. For the hearts of people by nature regard passion as good and incline towards it. The wise person does not commit a vile action.... God answered his prayer and strengthened him in innocence so that he acclimatized himself to the rigors of prison, and preferred those rigors to pleasure

involving disobedience to God.

Joseph Preaches Unity of God in Prison

Makkah: *And there entered with him*
in the prison two male spiritual warriors.
One of them said: Truly, I see myself pressing grapes in season.
And the other said:
Truly, I see myself carrying bread over my head
from which birds are eating. They said:
Tell us the interpretation of this.
Truly, we consider ***you***
among the ones who are doers of good. (12:36)
He said: The food you both are provided approaches you not,
but I will tell you of its interpretation before it approaches.
That is of what my Lord taught me.
Truly, I left the creed of a folk who believe not in God
and they, in the world to come, they are
ones who disbelieve. (12:37)
And I followed the creed of my fathers,
Abraham and Isaac and Jacob.
It had not been for us that we ascribe anything
as partners with God.
That is from the grace of God to us
and to humanity, except most of humanity
gives not thanks. (12:38)
O my two prison companions! Are ones that are different masters
better or God, The One, The Omniscient? (12:39)
Whomever you worship other than He are nothing
but names that you named
—you and your fathers
for which God caused not to descend any authority.
The determination is from God alone.
He commanded that you worship none but Him.
That is the truth-loving way of life,
except most of humanity knows not. (12:40)
O my two prison companions!
As for one of you, he will give intoxicants to drink to his master.
And as for the other, he will be crucified.
And birds will eat from his head.
The matter was decided about which you ask for advice. (12:41)
And he said to the one of them
whom he thought should be the one who is saved of the two:
Remember me to ***your*** *master.*
Then, Satan caused him to forget
the remembrance of him to his master

so Joseph lingered in expectation in prison
for a certain number of years. (12:42)

Commentary°

Joseph was placed in prison and it so happened that at that time two others were placed there from among the king's servants, namely his butler and his baker, on suspicion of their desiring to poison the king. They said this because they had seen him in the prison exhorting people and interpreting their visions.

This is as if he wanted to call them to a monotheistic outlook and guide them into the right path before coming on to the question they had asked him; as is the method of Prophets and such learned men as have the same status as prophets in respect of giving spiritual guidance and direction. He has therefore put first a thing which is a miracle vouchsafed on his account, consisting in the giving of information about the supernatural, in order to lead them to have confidence in him in the matter of the call to monotheism and the interpretation, by inspiration and revelation, not by such methods as divination and astrology. All this cites the cause for what has preceded.

This is either part of the citation of the cause for God's teaching Joseph or a fresh sentence paving the way for the call to monotheism and the demonstration of the fact that he belonged to the family of the Prophets, in order to strengthen their willingness to listen to him and rely on him. For this reason it was made legitimate for the humble man to praise himself so that he might be known and his example imitated. The repetition of the pronoun is to indicate that it is they pre-eminently who are unbelievers and thus emphasize their ingratitude in the next world.

Addressed to the two prisoners together with the other Egyptians belonging to their faith. This is an example of rhetorical climax in the call to monotheism and cogency of argument. For first he has explained to them the preferability of monotheism over polytheism by way of oratorical address. Next he has shown that the things they call gods worship depends either on the essential being of the object of worship or on something else and both these alternatives are excluded in the case of those things. Finally he prescribes what is the straightforward truth and upright faith; reason demands nothing else than that, nor can knowledge be satisfied with anything short of it.

Satan caused the butler to forget to mention him to his lord. It may mean that Satan made Joseph forget to make mention of God, with the result that he sought aid from someone else than God. To seek help from mortal men for the relief of troubles, though com-

mendable in general, is not appropriate to the status of Prophets. (12:42)

The King's Dream and Joseph's Interpretation

Makkah: *And the king said:*
Truly, I, I see seven fattened cows
eating seven lean ones
and seven ears of green wheat and others dry.
O Council: Render an opinion to me about my dream
if you had been able to expound dreams. (12:43)
They said: Jumbled nightmares.
And we are not of the interpretation of nightmares
ones who know. (12:44)
And said the man of the two of them who was delivered
and recalled after a period of time:
I will tell you its interpretation so send me. (12:45)
Joseph, O you just person!
Render an opinion to us about seven fattened cows
eaten by seven lean ones and seven ears of green wheat
and others dry so that perhaps I will return to the personages
so that perhaps they will know about you. (12:46)
He said: You will sow for seven years in like previous manner
and of what you reaped, then, forsake ears of wheat,
but a little of it that you may eat. (12:47)
Again, seven severe years will approach after that.
You will eat what you put forward,
but a little of what you keep in store. (12:48)
Again, after that, will approach a year
in which humanity will be helped with rain
and they will press in season. (12:49)

Commentary°

When Joseph's deliverance as at hand, the king saw seven fat cows which had emerged from a dry river-bed and seven lean ones; and the lean ones ate up the fat ones and the dry ones twined over the green ones until they had gained the upper hand over them. The full situation is not described here since it has been considered sufficient to relate what happened in the case of the cows.

The word originally means 'that which is gathered of all sorts of various plants and bundled up together," and hence it comes to be used metaphorically for "a nightmare." The plural is for rhetorical emphasis when applied as here to the single dream which is being characterized as false, so that it is like when you say 'so-and-so rides

horses.' Or alternatively, the plural is used because the dream in question included various matters. By dreams here they imply the specialized meaning for interpretation is applicable only to truthful dreams. This is as it were a second ground advanced in excuse for their ignorance of its interpretation.

Joseph Cleared of the False Charge

Makkah: *And the king said: Bring him to me.*
Then, when the Messenger brought about,
he said: Return to thy master and ask him:
What of the ladies, those who cut their hands?
Truly, my Lord is Knowing of their (f) cunning. (12:50)
He said: What was your (f) business when you solicited Joseph,
enticing him to evil?
They (f) said: God save us! We knew not any evil against him.
The woman of the great one said:
Now The Truth was discovered! I sought to solicit him,
enticing him to evil.
And, truly, he is among the ones who are sincere. (12:51)
Joseph said: That is so that the great one know
that I betray him not in his absence.
And that God guides not the cunning
of the ones who are traitors. (12:52)
And I declare my soul not innocent
Truly, the soul is that which incites to evil
but when my Lord had mercy.
Truly, my Lord is Forgiving, Compassionate. (12:53)
And the king said: Bring him to me
so that I attach him to myself.
Then, when he spoke to him he said:
Truly, this day you are with us secure, trustworthy. (12:54)
Joseph said: Assign me over the storehouses of the region.
Truly, I will be a knowing guardian. (12:55)
And, thus, We established Joseph firmly in the region
to take his dwelling in it when or where he wills.
We light Our mercy on whom We will
and We waste not the compensation
of ones who are doers of good. (12:56)
Truly, the compensation of the world to come
is better for those who believed
and had been God-conscious. (12:57)

Commentary°

He hesitated to come out of prison, and gave priority to the inquiry about the women and a call for an investigation into their case, in order that his innocence might be apparent and that it might be known that he had been imprisoned unjustly, and the envious might not be able to use his imprisonment as a means of blackening his reputation. This passage contains an indication that it is appropriate that one should imply one's best efforts to repel accusations, and that occasions for suspicion should be avoided.

This is what Joseph said when the messenger returned to him and told him of the women's statement. The passage contains an oblique reference to Zulaykha in connection with her having deceived her husband, and an affirmation of Joseph's own faithfulness; which is why it is followed by the next words. (12:52)

He did not wish by that preceding remark to clear himself or to be vain over his condition; but rather to show forth the innocency and grace with which God had favored him.

He saw that he trusted in everything. It is related that when he came out of the prison, he washed and cleaned himself and put on new clothes, and when he entered the king's presence, he said: O God, I ask **You** for somewhat of his good and I take refuge in **Your** glory and power from his evil.'Then he greeted the king and prayed for him in Hebrew. So the king said: What is this language? And he replied: The language of my fathers.

Now the king was acquainted with seventy languages, and addressed Joseph in them, and Joseph replied to him in all of them so that the king was amazed at him and said: I wish to hear my vision from you. So Joseph related it and described to him the cows and ears of corn and their meanings, according as the king had seen them. So the king placed him on the throne and deputed his business to him. There is also a tradition that Qitfir died about that time and the king appointed Joseph to his office, and married Joseph to Zulaykha and Joseph found her a virgin and there were born to him from her Ephraim and Manasseh.

Perhaps Joseph, when he saw that the king was going to employ him on the royal business, necessarily chose a sphere of action of which the benefits would be general and the results substantial. The passage contains an indication that it is legitimate to seek appointment to office, or announce one's readiness to take it, and to accept appointment oat the hand of an unbeliever, if it be known that there is no way to establish justice and control the populace except with the backing of the unbeliever.

It is said that when the king had made Joseph his vizier, Joseph

established justice and strove to make the harvests more abundant and regulate the revenues there from, until the years of scarcity arrived, and famine was general throughout Egypt and Syria and the adjoining regions. The people had recourse to him and he sold the crops first for money, until they had none left; then for ornaments and jewellery; then for animals; then for estates and landed property; then for their person al freedom, until he had enslaved them all. Then he reported the matter to the king, who said, 'Do as you think fit.' So Joseph freed them and returned to them their property. Canaan was afflicted with the same disaster as other lands.

Joseph Measures Out Corn to his Brothers

Makkah: *And Joseph's brothers drew near*
and they entered before him.
He recognized them, but they are ones who know him not. (12:58)
And when he equipped them with their food supplies,
he said: Bring me a brother of yours from your father.
See you not that I live up to full measure
and that I am best of the ones who host? (12:59)
Then, if you bring him not to me,
there will be no full measure for you with me,
nor will you come near me. (12:60)
They said: We will solicit his father for him
and, truly, we are ones who do it. (12:61)
And Joseph said to his spiritual warriors:
Lay their merchandise into their saddlebags
so that perhaps they will recognize it
when they turned about to their household
so that perhaps they will return. (12:62)
So when they returned to their father,
they said: O our father! The full measure was refused to us
so send our brother with us that we will obtain our measure.
And, truly, we will be ones who guard him. (12:63)
Jacob said: How will I entrust him to you
as I entrusted you with his brother before?
But, then, God is Best of One Who Guards.
And He is One Who is the Most Merciful
of the ones who are the most merciful. (12:64)
And when they opened their sustenance,
they found their merchandise was returned to them.
They said: O our father, this is what we desire.
Our merchandise was returned to us
and we will get provision for our household

and we will keep our brother safe
and add a camel's load of full measure.
That is an easy full measure. (12:65)
He said: I will not send him with you
until you give me a pledge by God
that you will bring him back to me,
unless you are enclosed yourselves.
And when they gave him their pledge,
he said: God is Trustee over what we say. (12:66)
And he said: O my sons! Enter not by one door,
but enter by different doors.
I will not avail you against God in anything.
Truly, the determination is but with God.
In Him I put my trust.
And in Him put their trust the ones who put their trust. (12:67)
And when they entered from where their father commanded,
it had not been availing them against God in anything,
but it was a need of Jacob's inner self which he satisfied.
And, truly, he was a possessor of knowledge
because We taught him,
except most of humanity knows not. (12:68)

Commentary°

Jacob advises them not to enter by one door. He advised this because they were men of fine and splendid appearance, and well known in Egypt for their intimacy with the king and honorable treatment by him, so Jacob feared, on their account that they should enter in a single group and so be subject to the evil eye. He probably did not give them this advice on the former occasion because they were at that time unknown. Alternatively, the motive of this advice as his fear for Benjamin. Effects may be brought about by psychological causes, one of which is the evil eye.

Joseph Meets His Brother

Makkah: *And when they entered before Joseph,*
he himself gave refuge to his brother.
*He said: Truly, I am **your** brother,*
so be not despondent for what they had been doing. (12:69)
So when he equipped them with their food supplies,
he laid the drinking cup into their brother's saddlebag.
Again, one who announces announced:
O you in the caravan! Truly, you are ones who are thieves. (12:70)
They said coming forward:

What is it that you are missing? (12:71)
They said: We are missing the king's drinking cup
and for him who brought it about is a camel's load and I am the
guarantor for it. (12:72)
They said: By God, certainly, you knew we drew not near
making corruption in the region.
And we had not been ones who are thieves. (12:73)
They said: What, then, will be the recompense for him
if you had been ones who lie? (12:74)
They said: The recompense for it will be
that he in whose saddlebag it was located will be the recompense.
Thus, we give recompense to the ones who are unjust. (12:75)
So he began with their sacks before the sack of his brother.
Again, he pulled it out of his brother's sack.
Thus, We contrived for Joseph.
He would not have taken his brother into the judgment of the king
unless God wills it.
We exalt in degree whomever We will,
and above all those possessors of knowledge
is One Who is Knowing. (12:76)
They said: If he steals, surely, a brother of his stole before.
But Joseph kept it secret within himself,
not showing it to them.
He said: You are in a worse place
And God is greater in knowledge of what you allege. (12:77)
They said: O the great one! Truly, for him is an old man
as his father so take one of us in his place.
Truly, we consider you among
the ones who are doers of good. (12:78)
He said: God be my safe place that we take
but him with Whom we found our sustenance.
Truly, we, then, would be of the ones who are unjust. (12:79)

Commentary°

This passage is used as evidence by those who assert that God is a 'Knower' in His own essence since they say if He were merely possessed of knowledge there would be according to the text above Him one more knowledgeable than Him. The answer to this is, that every creature endowed with knowledge because the context concerns created beings, and because *al-alim* is God.

Joseph Discloses His Identity

Makkah: *So when in regard to him they became hopeless,*

they conferred privately.
The eldest of them said: Know you not that your father,
surely, took a pledge from you by God
and before that you neglected your duty with Joseph.
So I will never quit this region until my father gives me permission
or God gives judgment in my case.
Return to your father and say:
O our father! Truly, thy son stole and we bore witness
only to what we knew.
And we had not been ones who guard the unseen. (12:81)
And ask the people of the town where we had been
and the people of the caravan in which we came forward.
And, truly, we are ones who are sincere. (12:82)
He said: You were enticed by your souls into an affair.
So patience is graceful.
Perhaps God will bring me them altogether.
Truly, He, He is The Knowing, The Wise. (12:83)
And he turned away from them and said:
O my bitterness for Joseph! And his eyes brightened
because of the sorrow that was choking him. (12:84)
They said: By God! ***You*** *will never*
discontinue remembering Joseph
until thou hast ruined ***your*** *health.*
You *would be among the ones who are perishing.* (12:85)
He said: I make not complaint
of my anguish and sorrow but to God.
And I know from God what you know not. (12:86)
O my sons! Go and search for Joseph and his brother.
And give not up hope of the solace of God.
Truly, no one gives up hope of the solace of God but the folk,
ones who are ungrateful. (12:87)
Then, when they entered to him, they said: O the great one!
Harm afflicted us and our household.
We drew near merchandise of scant worth so live up
to the full measure and be charitable to us.
Truly, God gives recompense
to the ones who give in charity. (12:88)
He said: Knew you what you accomplished with Joseph
and his brother when you are ones who are ignorant? (12:89)
They said: Are ***you****, truly, Joseph?*
He said: I am Joseph and this is my brother.
Surely, God showed us grace.
Truly, He Who is God-conscious and endures patiently,

then, surely, God will not waste the compensation
of the ones who are doers of good. (12:90)
They said: By God! Certainly,
God held you in greater favor above us.
And, truly, we had been ones who are inequitable. (12:91)
He said: No censure on you this day.
God forgive you.
And He is One Who is Most Merciful
of the ones who are most merciful. (12:92)
Go with this, my long shirt and cast it over the face of my father.
He will become seeing.
And bring me your household one and all. (12:93)

Jacob Goes to See His Son

Makkah: *And when they set forward*
with the caravan their father said:
Truly, I find the scent of Joseph
if you think me not weak of mind. (12:94)
They said: By God! Truly, you are long possessed
by thy wandering astray. (12:95)
Then, when the bearer of good tidings drew near,
he cast it over his face and he went back, seeing.
He said: Did I not say to you,
truly, I know from God what you know not? (12:96)
They said: O our father! Ask forgiveness for us for our impieties
Truly, we had been ones who are inequitable. (12:97
He said: I will ask forgiveness for you with my Lora
Truly, He, He is The Forgiving, The Compassionate. (12:98)
Then, when they entered to Joseph, he gave refuge to his parents
and said: Enter Egypt, if God willed,
as ones who are safe! (12:99)
And he exalted his parents to the throne.
And they fell down before him as ones who prostrate themselves.
And he said: O my father! This is the interpretation
of my dream from before.
My Lord has made it a reality.
And, surely, He did good to me
when He brought me out of the prison
and drew you near out of the desert
after Satan had sown enmity
between me and between my brothers.
Truly, my Lord is Subtle in what He wills.
Truly, He is The Knowing, The Wise. (12:100)

*My Lord! Surely, **You** had given me of the dominion.*
You had taught of the interpretation of events.
One Who is Originator of the heavens and the earth,
You are my protector in the present and in the world to come.
*Call me to Yourself as one who submits to **You***
and cause me to join
with the ones in accord with morality. (12:101)
That is of the tidings of the unseen that We reveal to you
And you had not been in their presence
when they agreed to their affair. And they plan. (12:102)
And most of humanity is not ones who believe,
even if you were eager. (12:103)
You ask them not for any compensation.
It is but a Remembrance to the worlds. (12:104)

Commentary°

The explicit future implied in *saufa* indicates that Jacob postponed the asking of forgiveness until the morning, or until the night prayer, or until the next Friday eve, looking for the time when prayer is most likely to be answered. Alternatively, he postponed it until he could seek sanction from Joseph for this action of their behalf; or, he postponed it until he should know that Joseph had pardoned them; for the pardon of the wronged person is a condition of divine forgiveness.

"Bowing down" in greeting and honor to him; for prostration by their custom served for that purpose. Alternatively, the meaning is "they fell down on his account prostrate to God in thanks." Alternatively, the pronoun in 'to him' refers to God. The plural subject of 'they fell down' refers to Joseph's parents and brothers. The raising up came later in time than the falling down, although it is placed in front of it in word order because the main concern of the passage is with his honoring them both. It is said that Joseph took his father round his treasury, and when Jacob saw the storehouse of papyri, he said: My son, how undutiful you are: you have these papyri in your possession yet you never wrote to me at a distance of only eight days' journey.' Joseph replied: Gabriel bade me not to. Will you not ask him why? inquired Jacob. You are easier in approach to him than I, said Joseph. So Jacob asked him, and Gabriel said: God commanded me so, because of your saying: I fear that the wolf will eat him; God said: Why did you not fear Me? (12:101)

It is said that Jacob stayed with him twenty-four years and then died, and directed that he should be buried in Syria beside his father; so Joseph took him and buried him there, then returned and survived

after him for twenty-three years, after which his soul yearned for the eternal kingdom, and he desired death, and God gathered him righteous and pure to Himself. And the Egyptians disputed about his burial-place until they were on the verge of fighting, so they decided to place him in a marble sarcophagus and bury him in the Nile in such a way that the water would pass over him and thereafter reach all Egypt so that they should all be on an equal footing in regard to him. Later Moses transported him to the burial-place of his ancestors. His age was 120. There were born to him from Rail, Ephraim and Manasseh, who was the ancestor of Joshua son of Nun and Rahmah wife of Job.

Histories of the Ancient People Serve as a Lesson

Makkah: *And how many signs of the heavens*
and the earth they pass by
while they are ones who turn aside from them! (12:105)
And most of them believe not in God,
but they be ones who are polytheists. (12:106)
Were they safe from the approach to them
of the overwhelming event
of the punishment from God or the approach on them
of the Hour suddenly while they are not aware? (12:107)
Say: This is my way. I call to God
I and whoever followed me are on clear evidence
And glory be to God! And I am not
among the ones who are polytheists. (12:108)
And We sent not before you as Messengers,
but men to whom We reveal from among the people of the towns.
So journey they not through the earth
and look on how had been the Ultimate End
of those who were before them?
And, truly, the abode of the world to come is better
for those who were God-conscious.
Will you not, then, be reasonable? (12:109)
When the Messengers became hopeless
and thought that they were lied against,
then, Our help drew near.
So We were to deliver whomever We will. And Our Might
will not be repelled from the folk, the ones who sin. (12:110)
Certainly, there had been in their narratives a lesson
for those imbued with intuition.

It had not been a discourse that is devised
except it established as true
what was before and decisively explained everything
and is a guidance and a mercy for a folk who believe. (12:111)

Commentary°

The meaning is: Whatever number you choose of conclusive proofs to the Creator's existence and wisdom and the perfection of His power and unity.

"Polytheists" by virtue of worshipping others than Him as do the pagans, or by taking the Doctors of the Law, or attributing to Him the begetting of offspring, or by believing in the principles of light and darkness, or by looking for causes as the Hellenistic philosophers. Some say the verse alludes to the polytheists of Mecca, others to the hypocrites of Madinah, others to the People of the Book, Jews and Christians.

Chapter 6: The 55th Chapter Revealed

And We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob. Each of them
We guided. And Noah We guided before and among his offspring
are David and Solomon and Job and Joseph and Moses and Aaron.
And, thus, We gave recompense
to the ones who are doers of good. (6:84)

Joseph the Messenger

Chapter 40: The 60th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, Joseph drew near you*
before with the clear portents,
but you ceased not in uncertainty
as to what he brought about to you.
Until when he perished you said:
God will never raise up a Messenger after him.
Thus, God causes him to go astray, one who is excessive,
one who is a doubter. (40:34)

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MOSES AND THE CHILDREN OF JACOB (ISRAEL), AARON, JETHRO (SHUAYB), THE TOWN BORDERING THE SEA, THE COMPANIONS OF THE WOOD (AL-AYKATI) AND THE COMPANIONS OF MIDIAN

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PREFACE

EXPLANATION OF THE CRITICAL THINKING QURANIC STUDIES TEXTBOOK SERIES

There are thirty books in this series. Books entitled *Book Year 1* to *Book Year 24* consist of one book for each year of the revelation. Books 25-28 are devoted to the Quranic stories of all other Prophets and Messengers in order of their dates. *Book 25: Adam, Cain and Abel, Enoch (Idris), Noah, Hud and the People of Aad; Saleh and the People of Thamud; Book 26: Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob (Israel), Joseph and Job; Book 27: Moses, Aaron, Children of Jacob* (known as Israel), *Jethro (Shuayb), Joshua, Khidr and Samuel; Book 28: David, Solomon, Elijah (Ilyas), Elisha (Alyasa), Jonah (Younis), Ezekiel (Dhul Kifl), Ezra (Uzayr), Dhul Qarnayn (Cyrus the Great or Alexander the Great), Luqman, Zechariah, John the Baptist (Yahya), Mary and Jesus.* The last two are: *Book 29: The Life of Prophet Muhammad from Birth to the Revelation* and *Book 30: Teacher's Manual.* The last, *Book 30,* has been prepared for the teacher's Lesson Plans.

SOURCES

The sources for the history include the works of Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Hashim, Waqidi, Ibn Sad and commentaries by Ibn Abbas, Jalalayn, Tustari and Sayyid Qutb. The sources for the commentaries of Ibn Abbas, Jalalayn and Tustari have been used with the permission of the publisher, the Royal Institute of Ahl al-Bayt in Jordan. They are available on their website www.altafsir.com.

The inclusion of excerpted commentaries (tafsir) by Sayyid Qutb's In the Shade of the Quran (available online) in this Critical Thinking Quranic Studies Textbook Series is because Sayyid Qutb is considered by some extremist groups as their intellectual source. By including excerpts from his eighteen volume Quranic commentary, extremists cannot disclaim the importance of learning critical thinking as this series is to help young adults learn HOW to think using self-realization (tahqiq) and critical thinking (furqan) skills taught by the Quran. This in order to arm young adults with the ability to choose reason over any irrational extremist ideology that is presented to them.

TERMINOLOGY

All Quranic signs are translations from *The Sublime Quran.* For the Muslim, the Quran is the Word (Logos) of God. It is this Word of God that has inspired artists, artisans, poets, philosophers and writers, those who had been the exponents of Islamic culture and civilization for almost 1500 years. Yesterday and today's Muslim wants to know more about each Word that God chose for His revelation through the Quran. This realization, in turn, prompted the translation of The Sublime Quran, an attempt to give the sense of unity

within the revelation to a non-Arabic speaking reader.

There are several points to note about the terminology used in the translation of the Quranic text and the commentaries.

1. The blessed Prophet did not bring a new religion; he came to confirm what was right in the messages of the previous Prophets. Does this translation speak to the universality of the Quran? The Quran tells the Prophet, the mercy to all of humanity, to speak to people in their own language. Following his example, in addition to the translation being unbounded by time, in several sensitive cases, the word chosen to translate an Arabic word is also of a universal or inclusive rather than a particular or exclusive nature. This adds to the broadening of the perspective and scope of the Quran so that it becomes inclusive rather than exclusive to one particular group of people. In other words, in this way a larger audience can relate to its message.

2. The Quran refers to itself (the Quran) from the very beginning of the revelation (68:35).

3 Most English translations of the Quran refer to the "Children of Israel." The word "Israel" when used in the Quran refers to Jacob, the patriarch of the children who followed him such as Joseph. Therefore, it should be the "Children of Jacob" as it appears in these texts.

5. The word "*kufr*" and "*kafir*" have been translated here as "ingratitude" and "ungrateful" where the context allows. This is the first meaning of the word and many of us in our lifetime have met Muslims who are "ungrateful." It is the ungrateful Muslims who practice intolerance by declaring anyone who says: Peace be upon you (as-salam alaykum) as a non-believer (with what is called *takfir*). In those cases, it would not be suitable to call them "unbelievers" or "infidels," but it is clearly appropriate to refer to them as being "ungrateful" and this would include the early Quraysh, ungrateful for God's revelation and prophethood of Muhammad, who ridiculed the Prophet and fought against the Quranic message of love, forgiveness and peace.

6. Yet another example of the use of inclusive language in an attempt to speak to people in their own language, is the use of God instead of Allah. Many English speaking Muslims, as well as many of the English translations of the Quran to date, use Allah when speaking English instead of God. The intention on the part of the speaker is to maintain a sense of piety. They feel that using Allah in English moves them in that direction. Many even claim that the word Allah cannot be translated.

However well-intentioned a person may be, when speaking English, the use of the word Allah instead of God, first of all, does not follow the Quranic verse that tells the Prophet to speak to people in their own language. Subsequently, it does not follow the Sunnah of the Prophet who did speak to people in their own language.

In addition, it creates a divide between Muslims who use the word and the English speaking people of various faiths to whom they are speaking. In

effect, it creates the illusion that there is more than One God—Allah and God. The response of the English speaking person of another faith is to say: I do not understand your religion; you have a different God than I do and you call Him Allah.

It needs to be clearly explained to English speaking Muslims that, unlike what they may feel, they do not have a monopoly on the word Allah. Arabic speaking Christians and Arabic speaking Jews also refer to God as Allah. The Old Testament and New Testament, when translated into Arabic, use Allah for God.

English speaking Muslims, therefore, need to recall the message of the Quran that God is One (tawhid). In addition, the Prophet did not bring a new religion but confirmed what was correct in the messages of previous Prophets, namely, that God is One. Finally, they need to follow the example of the Prophet, as the Quran says he is the model or example to be followed, by speaking to people in their own language.

7. The Arabic language, much like old English, has the second person singular (masculine: anta (where the verb ends in ka). The English equivalent is the subject: "thou" or the object: "thee" or the possessive: "thy." As these are no longer in common usage in English, wherever the original Arabic uses one of these terms, the word "**you**" or "**your**" appear in bold font so that the reader knows the original was the second person singular. When the Quran is speaking directly to the Prophet, it uses the pronoun "thee" or "thou" so it is an important distinction to make.

Using you (second person plural) is done to help English speaking readers, recognizing that using the second person plural pronoun you (masculine: antum where the verb ends in masculine: kum) for God is to intimate that God is plural, the only sin in the Quran that is unforgivable. By putting the pronoun **you** in bold font indicates the true intention.

8. For the Arabic word "*ayah*," the English word used in these texts is "sign" rather than the Biblical term, "verse."

9. Several of the signs were abrogated over time. However the indication of a sign being abrogated was done after the complete revelation of the Quran. Whether or not a sign was later abrogated does not change the fact that the first Muslims who listened to the Quran, heard the signs that may have later been said to have been abrogated and that a hafez of the Quran recites all the signs as they appear in the original Arabic revealed to the Prophet. Whatever signs scholars later determined to be abrogated are still part of the Quran and, therefore, are not relevant to learning to be a Quranic critical thinker, learning HOW to think.

10. The first number that appears when the Quranic Chapters begin refers to the chapter number in the chronological order of the revelation so that Quranic Chapter 110 which was the last to be revealed is number 114 in the chronological order.

11. It is to be noted that whenever the name of Muhammad, Prophet Muham-

mad or the Prophet are used, one may say a silent prayer of blessings for him.

12. All the signs in the text are in chronological order.

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Chicago 2017

Moses and the Children of Jacob

The Scrolls of Moses

Chapter 53: The 23rd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *is in the scrolls of Moses* (53:36)

Commentary°

The Quran mentions Moses referring to the scrolls, tablets or scripture of the Torah and the Quran asks this question of those who turn from the Messenger and his reminder to remember God and who care only for what this world has to offer: Does the Messenger Muhammad claim that he knows the unseen or what is in the scrolls of Moses?

The People of Pharoah Deny Moses

Chapter 54: The 37th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, drew near*
the warning to the people of Pharaoh. (54:41)
They denied Our signs, all of them.
So We took them with a taking,
One Who is Almighty, Omnipotent. (54:42)

Commentary°

These historical accounts are concluded with a brief reference to the rate of a famous community of the ungrateful outside Arabia. (54:41-54:42) Thus the whole story of Pharaoh and his entourage is summed up by mentioning its beginning and end: their receiving warnings, their rejection of all the signs and miracles that the Messenger sent to them showed them, and their subsequent punishment by the Almighty. The reference here to God s might and ability to carry out His will indicate that their end was violent and calamitous. It implies an allusion to the hollowness of Pharaoh's power and his ability to inflict injustice. All his might is shown to be worthless. He could avail himself of nothing. God inflicted such a punishment on him and his host that can only be carried out by the Almighty. This is most fitting because of the injustice and tyranny they practiced for so long.

The People of Pharoah Deny Moses

Chapter 38: The 38th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *The folk of Noah before them denied*
and Ad and Pharaoh,
the possessor of the stakes, **(38:12)**

The Message of Moses

Chapter 7: The 39th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Again, We raised up Moses after them*
with Our signs to Pharaoh and his Council,
but they did wrong to them.
So look on how had been the Ultimate End
of the ones who make corruption. (7:103)
And Moses said: O Pharaoh! Truly, I am a Messenger
from the Lord of the worlds. (7:104)
I am approved on condition
that I say nothing but The Truth about God.
Surely, I drew near you with a clear portent from your Lord.
So send the Children of Jacob with me. (7:105)
Pharaoh said: If you had been drawing near with a sign,
then, approach with it if you had been
among the ones who are sincere. (7:106)
Then, Moses cast his staff.
That is when it became a clear serpent. (7:107)
And he drew out his hand.
That is when it was shimmering white
to the ones who look. (7:108)

Commentary°

The chapter now turns to the story of Moses from when he confronted Pharaoh and the leaders of his government with the divine message.

Pharaoh and his people certainly took a wrongful and oppressive attitude, rejecting God's signs and revelations. (7:103) Every tyrant who imposes his law on human beings in preference to God's law is a spreader of corruption.

Here is an encounter between truth and falsehood, faith and rejection. It is a scene that brings the Messenger, who calls on people to believe in the Lord of all the worlds, face to face with a tyrant who claims, and indeed practices, lordship over his people.

Moses addresses the Pharaoh with his plain title, "Pharaoh" (7:104-105). He does not call him: My lord, as do those who do not really know who the true Lord is. Moses combines good manners with self assurance, addressing Pharaoh with his simple title in order to point out to him his true position while asserting at the same time the greatest fact in the universe: I am a Messenger from the Lord of all the worlds. (7:104)

Moses confronted Pharaoh with this great fact in his own capacity as a Messenger from the Lord of the universe, committed to stat-

ing the truth about God who gave him his message. (7:104-105)

Moses was commanded to demand that Pharaoh should release to him the Children of Jacob . (7:104-105) The first statement is the preamble to the logical conclusion given in the second. The two go hand in hand and cannot be separated.

Pharaoh and the leaders of his government were fully aware of the import of the declaration that God is the Lord of all the worlds. They were aware that the declaration implied the termination of Pharaoh's authority, the overthrow of his government and the end to his tyranny. They felt, however, that they had a chance to denounce Moses as a liar. Therefore, Pharaoh demands a sign from Moses to prove his claim (7:106)

Pharaoh felt that if he could prove that Moses was a liar, then all his claims could be refuted and all danger would be removed. But Moses had the complete answer. (7:107-7:108) This came as a complete surprise to Pharaoh and the elders of his people. The staff became a real serpent that was plainly visible. Moreover, when Moses took his hand out of his pocket, it was seen as very white, without any sign of illness. This in itself was a miraculous sign, because he only had to put his hand in his pocket again for it to regain its original dark complexion.

Pharaoh and his Magicians Defeated

Makkah: *The Council of the folk of Pharaoh said:*
Truly, this is a knowing sorcerer. (7:109)
He wants to drive you out from your region
so what is your command? (7:110)
They said: Put him and his brother off
and send to the cities to the place
where ones who assemble are. (7:111)
*Let them approach **you** with every knowing sorcerer.* (7:112)
And the ones who are sorcerers drew near to Pharaoh.
They said: Truly, would we have
compensation if we had been the ones who are victors? (7:113)
Pharaoh said: Yes! And, truly, you will be
of the ones who are brought near to me. (7:114)
*They said: O Moses! Either **you** cast,*
or will we be the ones who cast? (7:115)
He said: You cast. So when they cast,
they cast a spell on the eyes of the personages and terrified them.
And a tremendous sorcery drew near. (7:116)
*And We revealed to Moses that: Cast **your** staff.*
That is when it swallowed what they faked. (7:117)

Thus, The Truth came to pass and proved false
what they had been doing. (7:118)
So they were vanquished there and turned about
as ones who are disgraced. (7:119)
The ones who are sorcerers were made to fall down
as ones who prostrate themselves. (7:120)
They said: We believed in the Lord of the worlds, (7:121)
the Lord of Moses and Aaron. (7:122)
Pharaoh said: You believed in Him
before I give permission to you.
Truly, this is a plan you planned in the city
that you drive out the people from it but you will know. (7:123)
I will, certainly, cut off your hands
and your feet on opposite sides.
Again, I will cause you to be crucified, one and all. (7:124)
They said: Truly, we are ones who are turning to our Lord. (7:125)
***You** have sought revenge on us*
only because we believed in the signs of our Lord
when they drew near us.
Our Lord! Pour out patience on us and call us
*to **Yourself** as ones who submit to God.* (7:126)

Commentary°

Therefore, the great ones began their consultations with Pharaoh. (7:109-7:110) Their consultations were concluded with agreement on a certain procedure. (7:111-7:112)

Pharaoh's aides determined, after their lengthy discussions, that Pharaoh should gain time and fix an appointment with Moses. Meanwhile, he would send heralds to summon to his presence all skilful sorcerers, so that they could overpower what they claimed to be Moses's sorcery. Despite all that we know about Pharaoh's tyranny, his action in this regard was much milder than what twentieth-century tyrants did when they confronted the advocates of divine faith who proclaimed that God is the only Lord in the universe, and thereby threatened the authority of self-proclaimed sovereignty.

They are mere professionals. To them, both sorcery and priesthood are professions. (7:113-7:114)

Pharaoh's sorcerers were reassured that they would have a generous reward, and they looked forward to be in positions close to Pharaoh. They came ready for the match, and began by an open challenge to Moses. Little did they realize that God was storing for them something far better than their promised wages: They said: Moses! Either you shall throw [first], or we shall be the first to throw? He

answered: You throw [first]. (7:115-7:116) It is a clearly apparent challenge. As they gave Moses the choice, they demonstrated their confidence that they would triumph. But we also see Moses unperturbed by the challenge, full of confidence as he answered: You throw first. That short answer reveals how completely assured Moses was. We often find the Quran using a single word to impart such rich connotations.

But then the chapter delivers a surprise. Indeed, Moses himself was surprised as he found himself face to face with very skilful sorcery that strikes awe in people's hearts. (7:116)

But something totally unexpected takes place to surprise Pharaoh and his aides, these sorcerers and the masses gathered in the large square which served as a stage for this contest. (7:117-7:119) They were defeated there and then, and became utterly humiliated. (7:119)

The same fact is driven home to Pharaoh when Moses wins the confrontation with Pharaoh's sorcerers and they declare their acceptance of God's oneness. (7:120-7:122) Again when Pharaoh threatens them with severe punishment, they turn to their Lord and declare that they will always turn to Him in life, death and future life. (7:125-7:126)

But the surprise is not over yet. The scene brings yet another, even greater surprise: The sorcerers fell down prostrating themselves. (7:120-7:122)

Pharaoh felt his throne shake, and it is well known that the throne and the crown represent all that is in the life of a tyrant. Tyrants are always ready to commit any crime, without hesitation, in order to retain power. (7:123-7:124)

Haughty, (7:123) he really expects them to seek his permission before their hearts, consciences and souls open up to receive the truth, when they themselves have no control over these and cannot prevent anything from touching or penetrating them. Perhaps Pharaoh wanted them to repel the truth as it penetrated their souls, or to stifle their faith as its shoots began to spring up and blossom inside their souls, or to cover their eyes so that they could not see the light. That is tyranny: ignorant and stupid, but at the same time arrogant and conceited.

There is another element which influences Pharaoh's attitude: namely, fear that his power is threatened. (7:123)

It was only expected that Pharaoh should issue his fearful warning. (7:123-7:124) Torture, disfigurement and un-abating persecution: these are the methods to which tyranny resorts when it finds itself in confrontation with the truth. The tyrants realize that they

cannot refute the argument of the truth, therefore they have to suppress it by force.

A human being who believes in the message of the truth does not stop to inquire. (7:125-7:126) It is the unshakeable faith that will not submit to any worldly power. It is the faith that is reassured about the future, in the knowledge that all human beings will return to their Lord. With faith, people have the reassurance of being close to Him. (7:125)

When anyone realizes what the battle is all about and to whom he should turn for help, he will not ask his enemy to ensure his own safety. He will only pray to his Lord to give him patience and perseverance in times of adversity, and to help him to continue in an attitude of submission to God until he dies. (7:126)

The Persecution of the Children of Jacob

Makkah: *And the Council of the folk of Pharaoh said:*
*Will **you** forsake Moses*
and his folk to make corruption in and on the earth
*while they forsake **you** and **your** gods? Pharaoh said: We will slay*
their sons and we will save alive their women.
And truly we are ones who are ascendant over them. (7:127)
Moses said to his folk: Pray for help from God and have patience.
Truly, the earth belongs to God. He gives it as inheritance
to whom He wills of His servants.
And that is the Ultimate End
for the ones who are God-conscious. (7:128)
*They said: We were maligned before **you** have*
*approached us and after **you** have drawn near to us.*
He said: Perhaps your Lord will cause your enemy to perish
and make you successors to him on the earth
so that He will look on how you do. (7:129)

Commentary°

Pharaoh was enraged by these words, feeling that his whole regime was seriously threatened. Therefore, he made his brutal intentions clear. (7:127)

Now we see the Prophet Moses speaking to his people in the language and with the passion of a Prophet who truly knows His Lord and how His will works. He impresses on them the need to endure adversity with patience and to seek God's help to overcome it. He enlightens them about the rules God has put in place in the universe, making it clear to them that the whole earth belongs to God alone and that He causes it to be inherited by any group of His ser-

vants according to His will. The ultimate trial will inevitably be given to those who fear none other than God. They complain to him that before he came they endured a wave of persecution and torture similar to that which they now suffer after his arrival. They feel that such persecution is endless. He declares that he sincerely hopes that God will destroy their enemy and cause them to be the heirs of the land to see how they conduct themselves when they are given the trust of building human life on earth. (7:128-7:129)

The Delivery of the Children of Jacob

Makkah: *And, certainly, We took the people of Pharaoh*
with years of diminution of fruits,
so that perhaps they will recollect. (7:130)
And when benevolence drew near them,
they would say: This belongs to us.
But if an evil deed lights on them, they [blame] Moses
and those who were with him.
Certainly, that which are their [fortunes] are with God
except most of them know not. (7:131)
And they said: Whatever sign ***you*** *have brought to us*
to cast a spell on us with it,
we will not be ones who believe in ***you.*** (7:132)
Then, We sent on them the deluge and the locusts and the lice
and the frogs and blood as distinct signs,
but they grew arrogant
and they had been a folk, ones who sin. (7:133)
And when the wrath fell on them, they said: O Moses!
Call to ***your****Lord for us because of the compact made with* ***you.***
If ***you*** *were to remove the wrath from us,*
we would, certainly, believe in ***you.***
And we will send the Children of Jacob with ***you.*** (7:134)
But when We removed the wrath from them for a term,
that which is conclusive, they break their oath. (7:135)
So We requited them and drowned them in the water of the sea
because they denied Our signs
and they had been ones who are heedless of them. (7:136)
And We gave as inheritance to the folk
who had been taken advantage of
due to their weakness, the east of the region
and its west which We blessed.
And completed was the fairer Word of ***your*** *Lord*
for the Children of Jacob
because they endured patiently.

And We destroyed what Pharaoh and his folk had been crafting
and what they had been constructing. (7:137)
And We brought the Children of Jacob over the sea.
Then, they approached on a folk
who give themselves up to their idols.
They said: O Moses! Make for us a god like the gods they have.
He said: Truly, you are an ignorant folk! (7:138)
Truly, these are the ones who are ruined
and falsehood is what they had been doing. (7:139)
He said: Should I look for any god other than God for you
while He gave you an advantage over the worlds? (7:140)

Commentary°

The story also relates how God subjected Pharaoh's people to several trials, allowing different types of hardship to afflict them. Nevertheless, they persist in their rejection of God's message, making all types of excuses. Eventually destruction befalls them. (7:130-7:136)

At this stage in the conflict, the Supreme Power intervenes to settle the issue between the two camps. (7:130) This was a first warning given in the form of drought and poor harvests. In the richly fertile land of Egypt, this was a highly worrying situation that called for reflection and reconsideration Pharaoh's people considered every good fortune that came their way as their due. Affliction and poor harvests were attributed to Moses and his followers as people who brought bad omen. (7: 131)

But Pharaoh's people were too arrogant, always persisting with their evil ways and paying no heed to God's signs or to any test to which they were put. (7:132)

At this juncture, the supreme power of God intervenes. (7:133) They recognized that they themselves had no means of lifting their hardship. (7:134) Every time they broke their promise and resorted to their same ways and practices before the plague had smitten them. But the plague was lifted only in accordance with God's will so as to let them alone for a while until their appointed term had come. (7:135)

The end then takes place in accordance with God's law of punishing the ungrateful after having tested them both with affliction and affluence.

Having given Pharaoh and his people every chance, and assigned for them a term that they were certain to reach, God destroyed Pharaoh and his clique. He also fulfilled His promise to the oppressed who remained patient in adversity. (7:136-7:137)

The swiftness of the punishment has its effect that fills us with awe. (7:136) Just one strike and they are all destroyed. Proud, arrogant and despotic they certainly were, and suddenly they sink right to the bottom of the sea. It is certainly a fitting recompense. (7:136) The compatibility is made clear between their attitude of denying God's signs, choosing to remain heedless of them and this fitting destiny. We are clearly told that events do not come as a result of coincidence. They do not just happen haphazardly, as simple people tend to think.

The chapter glides over all these events and shifts from one period of time to another in order to highlight the fact that they were established and given power to be free to conduct their own affairs. This provides a clear contrast with their state of weakness when they endured Pharaoh's persecution. (7:137)

No sooner did Moses, guided by God, deliver them from Pharaoh's humiliation—He caused Pharaoh and his people to drown before their very eyes—than they inclined themselves to a type of worship akin to Pharaoh's people: We led the Children of Jacob across the sea; and thereupon they came upon people who were dedicated to the worship of some idols of theirs. (7:138)

Motivated by his faith in God, the Lord of the universe, Moses was very angry. He could not understand how his people could relapse into paganism. (7:138) .

Moses explains to his people what may result out of their request, pointing to the terrible end that awaits those whom they wanted to imitate, making gods similar to theirs. (7:139)

But Moses' anger at his people's attitude takes an even stronger expression and in a higher pitch that also wonders at how they could so quickly forget God's grace when its manifestations are still there. (7:140)

That they were favored above all humanity in their own time was reflected in the fact that they were chosen to be the bearers of the divine message of God's Oneness. This is the greatest favor of all. They were also chosen to be the heirs to inherit the blessed land, which was at that time in pagan hands. How could they, after all this, request their Prophet to seek for them a deity other than God, when they were at that very moment enjoying God's grace?

The Physical Eyes Can Never See God

Makkah: *Mention when We rescued you*
from the people of Pharaoh (7:141)
And We appointed thirty nights for Moses.
And We completed them with ten more.

Thus, fulfilled was the time appointed by his Lord of forty nights.
And Moses said to his brother, Aaron:
Be my successor among my folk and make things right
and follow not the way of the ones who make corruption. (7:142)
And when Moses drew near Our time appointed
and his Lord spoke to him, he said: O my Lord!
Cause me to see that I look on ***You****.*
He said: ***You*** *will never see Me but look on the mountain.*
Then, if it stayed fast in its place, then, ***you*** *will see Me.*
Then, when his Lord Self-disclosed to the mountain,
He made it as ground powder and Moses fell down swooning.
And when he recovered he said: Glory be to ***You****!*
I repented to ***You*** *and I am the first*
of the ones who believe. (7:143)
He said: O Moses! Truly, I favored ***you*** *above humanity*
by My messages and by My assertion.
So take what I gave ***you***
and be among the ones who are thankful. (7:144)
And We wrote down for him on the Tablets
something of all things and an admonishment
and a decisive explanation of all things.
So take these with firmness
and command ***your*** *folk to take what is fairer.*
I will cause you to see the abodes
of the ones who disobey. (7:145)
I will turn away from My signs
those who increase in pride on the earth without right.
And if they see every sign, they believe not in it.
And if they see the way of right judgment,
yet they will not take that way to themselves.
But if they see the way of error,
they will take themselves to that way.
That is because they denied Our signs
and had been ones who are heedless of them. (7:146)
And as for those who denied Our signs
and the meeting in the world to come,
their actions were fruitless.
Will they be given recompense
but for what they had been doing? (7:147)

Commentary°

Now we move on to witness the eighth scene in the story when Moses is preparing himself for a meeting with his great Lord in this

life. He gives specific instructions to his brother, the Prophet Aaron, before he leaves for that meeting. (7:142)

Just before leaving for his period of seclusion and dedication, Moses gave his instructions to the man who was to deputize for him. (7:142) Moses was aware that his brother, Aaron, was also a Prophet sent alongside him by his Lord. But a believer always gives good counsel to other believers. Moses was aware of the heavy burden Aaron was about to shoulder, and of the nature of the Children of Jacob. Aaron welcomed the good advice given him by his brother. Advice is felt to be a burden only by wicked people who want to break loose, or by arrogant people who feel that to take advice is beneath them. It is a small man who refuses to take a supporting hand in order to show that he can cope on his own.

The whole mountain was thus leveled down with no obtrusions on the surface of the earth. Moses was overawed. (7:143) He was completely unconscious.

God's Messengers are always the first to believe in the greatness of their Lord and in His revelations. God commands them to declare that they are the first to believe. The Quran reports in several instances that they comply and make that declaration.

Once more God's grace was bestowed on Moses in abundance. He soon received the happy news of his being chosen to carry God's message to his people after they had been saved. His message to Pharaoh and his people focused on that deliverance. (7:144)

The chapter then tells us how Moses was given the message and its contents. (7:145)

At the end of this scene we have a clear statement of what will eventually happen to those who defy every right and behave arrogantly, turning away deliberately from every sign God has given and every directive He has issued. The statement plainly and accurately describes the nature of this type of people, using all the artistic touches of the Quranic style. (7:146-7:147)

The Children of Jacob Begin Worshipping the Calf

Makkah: *And the folk of Moses took to themselves after him*
from out of their glitter a calf,
a lifeless body like one
that has the lowing sound of flocks.
See they not that it neither speaks to them
nor guides them to a Way?
Yet they took it to themselves.

And they had been the ones who are unjust. (7:148)
And when they became ones who are remorseful
and saw that they, surely, went astray,
they said: If our Lord not have mercy on us and forgive us,
we will, certainly, be among the ones who are losers. (7:149)
And when Moses returned to his folk enraged, grieved,
he said: Miserable was what you succeeded in after me.
Would you hasten the command of your Lord?
And he cast down the Tablets.
He took his brother by his head, pulling him to himself.
Aaron said: O son of my mother,
truly, the folk took advantage of my weakness
and are about to kill me.
So let not my enemies gloat over me
and assign me not with the folk,
the ones who are unjust. (7:150)
Moses said: Lord! Forgive me and my brother
and cause us to enter into ***Your*** *mercy*
for ***You*** *are One Who is Most Merciful*
of the ones who are merciful. (7:151)

Mercy Promised to Those Who Accept the Messenger

Makkah: *Those who took the calf to themselves*
attain anger from their Lord
and abasement in this present life.
And, thus, We give recompense to the ones who devise. (7:152)
But those who did evil deeds and repented
and, again, believed, truly, ***your*** *Lord, after that,*
will be Forgiving, Compassionate. (7:153)
And when the anger subsided in Moses, he took the Tablets.
There was guidance and mercy in their inscription for those,
they who have reverence for their Lord. (7:154)
And Moses chose of his folk seventy men for Our time appointed.
And when the quaking of the earth took them,
he said: Lord! If ***You*** *will,*
You *would cause them to perish and me before.*
Would ***You*** *cause us to perish*
for what the foolish among us accomplished?
It is not but ***Your*** *test.*
With it ***You*** *will cause to go astray*
whom ***You*** *will and* ***You*** *will guide whom* ***You*** *had willed.*

You are our protector, so forgive us and have mercy on us for You are Best of the ones who forgive. (7:155)

Commentary°

At this point, the final judgment is passed by the One who has the authority to give such a judgment. God's words follow directly on what the Quran relates of the words in the familiar Quranic fashion. (7:152-7:153)

In his absence, the people of Moses took to the worship of the effigy of a calf made of their ornaments, which gave a lowing sound. Did they not see that it could neither speak to them nor give them any guidance? Yet they took to worshipping it, for they were evildoers. (7:148-149)

That was typical of the nature of the Children of Jacob who could hardly move one step along the straight path before they deviated. They were hardly able to elevate themselves, in their beliefs and concepts, above what is physical and tangible. Even a short lull in exhortation and reminders could see them relapsing into ingratitude.

Eventually, the farce died down, the truth was clear to all, and it was plain to everyone how far into stupid error they had sunk. Error gave way to remorse. (7:149)

All this took place when Moses was with his Lord, addressing his appeal to Him. He was unaware of what his people had done in his absence. At this point, scene eleven is raised before our eyes. (7:150-7:151)

We see how terribly angry Moses was. Anger can be felt in both what he said and did, particularly seizing his brother by the head and dragging him. (7:150)

Those two signs serve as a pause in order to comment on the ultimate destiny of those who worshipped the calf inventing falsehood against God. They come in the middle of this scene, but then the chapter picks it up again. (7:154).

The Seventy Chosen Children of Jacob: The chapter then begins a new scene, in which we see Moses selecting seventy men from among his people. (7:155-157)

Reports differ as to the reason for this appointment. It may have been set so that they would declare their repentance and pray to God to forgive the Children of Jacob after they had sunk back into error and disbelief .They did just that until God told them to stop and accepted their penance. Those seventy men were the best among them. The way the choice is expressed in Arabic makes them stand out from the whole community of Children of Jacob.

Nevertheless, what happened to this choice group? They were seized by a violent trembling and dropped unconscious. The reason for this, as mentioned in another chapter, was that they asked Moses to show them God so that they would believe him and accept the law He has given them in the tablets.The most singular thing is that they should make such a request when they were supposed to declare their repentance and seek God's forgiveness.

Moses, on the other hand, turned to his Lord imploring Him to bestow His forgiveness and mercy, declaring his total submission to Him. (7:155) That is the mark of total submission to God's power. Moses makes sure to declare his own submission as he addresses his supplication to God to forgive his people, end their test and to spare them from destruction because of the deed perpetrated by some fools among them. (7:155)

Thus Moses declares his understanding of what was taking place, that it was all a trial. In every trial, God guides those who understand its nature and recognize it as a test. He also lets those who ignore it to go deeper into error. Moses reiterates his recognition as a prelude to an appeal to God for His help to enable him and his people to pass the trial successfully. (7:155)

We are returning to **You** in repentance. We seek **Your** protection and support. (7:156) We see here how the appeal for forgiveness and mercy by Moses was preceded by a declaration of full submission to God and recognition of the purpose of his trial. It is concluded with a declaration of a return to God to seek His protection. Thus, it serves as an example for supplication to be followed by every good servant of God, the glorious, the beneficent

Prophet Moses and the Twelve Springs of Water

Makkah: *And among the folk of Moses*
there is a community that guides
with The Truth and by it is just. (7:159)
And We sundered them into twelve tribes as communities.
And We revealed to Moses when his folk asked him for water:
*Strike the rock with **your** staff.*
Then, burst forth out of it twelve springs:
Surely, each clan knew its drinking place.
And We shaded them with cloud shadows.
We caused to descend manna and the quails for them.
Eat of what is good that We provided you!
And they did not wrong Us,
but they had been doing wrong to themselves. (7:160)
And mention when it was said to them:

Inhabit this town and eat from it wherever you willed.
Say: Unburden us of sin!
And enter the door as ones who prostrate themselves
We will forgive you your transgressions.
We will increase the ones who are doers of good. (7:161)
But among those who did wrong, they substituted a saying
other than what was said to them.
Then, We sent wrath from heaven
because they had been doing wrong. (7:162)

Commentary°

The chapter resumes its account of the certain aspects of the history of the Children of Jacob, picking it up after the violent trembling that seized the seventy people Moses had chosen for the appointment set by God. Moses was absorbed in a heartfelt supplication to his Lord to save them. We know from the accounts given in other chapter s that these seventy people were resurrected and returned to their folk, full of faith. The chapter picks up the thread of this story, but begins first by stating that not everyone among the Children of Jacob was in error. (7:159)

The chapter then resumes its account of the historical events. (7:160) These are aspects of God's care which continued to be extended to Moses and his people, even after they strayed away and worshipped the calf, then atoned for their error as God told them and He accepted their repentance. This also comes after they demanded to see God Himself and were stunned by the trembling, before God brought them back to life in answer to Moses's prayers. God's care is demonstrated here in organizing them into twelve communities, according to their ancestry. Each community traced their ancestry to one of the children of the Prophet Jacob, who was also known as Israel. They confirmed their allegiance on tribal lines. (7:160)

God's care is also manifest in assigning a spring to each community so that none of them would try to take what belonged to others. (7:160)

Another aspect of God's care was to send clouds to give them shade from the burning desert sun, and to bestow on them from on high manna, a kind of wild honey, and quails to provide them with food after their drink had been guaranteed. (7:160) A further aspect of God's care was the fact that all these good things were made lawful to them, as nothing had been forbidden them yet in punishment for their disobedience. (7:160)

God's care is manifest in all that, but the nature of the Children of Jacob continued to be rebellious, unwilling to keep to the path of

guidance, as clearly appears from the final comment of this sign which mentions all these blessings that gave them water out of the rock, shade in the burning desert sun and wholesome, delicious food. (7:160) Disobedience to God and straying away from His path were the manifestations of their wronging themselves. Such disobedience could cause God no harm, because God has no need of the Children of Jacob or anyone else. Indeed, His kingdom is not affected at all even if they and all creatures were to unite in total disobedience to Him. Nor is His kingdom increased in any way, if all creatures were to continue to obey Him without fail. People simply wrong themselves by disobedience to God and straying away from His path.

Moses Raised Up as a Messenger

Chapter 25: The 42nd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And We said: You both go to the folk who denied Our signs. Then, We destroyed them, an utter destruction.* (25:35) *Again, We raised up after them Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh and his Council with Our signs. Then, they grew arrogant, and they had been a folk, ones who sin.* (25:36)

Moses a Messenger and a Prophet

Chapter 19: The 44th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And remember Moses in the Book. Truly, he had been one who was devoted and he had been a Messenger, a Prophet.* (19:51) *And We proclaimed to him from the right edge of the mount and We brought him near privately.* (19:52) *And We bestowed on him out of Our mercy his brother Aaron, a Prophet.* (19:53)

Commentary°

The chapter moves on, speaking about the same branch of Abraham's seed and reminding us of Moses and Aaron. (19:51-19:53)

Moses is described here as one who was chosen for the task of dedication to God's call. He is identified as a Prophet who is entrusted with a Message that he must deliver to people. A Prophet is not given the same task. He is an advocate of faith that he receives from God directly. Among the Children of Jacob there were many Prophets who were given the task of advocating the message delivered by Moses and judging among people according to the Torah revealed to him by God. (5:44)

The grace granted to Moses is highlighted as he was called out

from the right side of Mount Sinai, that was the right side of Moses as he stood at that moment facing the Mount. He was drawn so close as to be spoken to in communion. We do not know how this communication took place, or how Moses understood it. Was it a voice heard by Moses through his ears in the normal way, or was it an address received by his whole being. Nor do we know how God prepared Moses to receive His own words. But we believe that all this took place. It is simply very easy for God to accomplish it, bringing His servant into communion with Him while at the same time retaining his humanity. We must not forget that the human being acquired his status with the breathing in of God's spirit into him.

Moses Commissioned with the Messengership

Chapter 20: The 45th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Has the conversation of Moses*
*approached **you**?* (20:9)
When he saw a fire, he said to his people:
Abide! Truly, I observed a fire so that perhaps
I will bring you some firebrand from it
or I find guidance at the fire. (20:10)
When he approached it, it was proclaimed: O Moses! (20:11)
*Truly, I—I am **your** Lord! So take off **your** shoes;*
*truly, **you** are one who is in the sanctified valley of Tuwa.* (20:12)
*And I chose **you** so listen to what is revealed:* (20:13)
Truly, I—I am God. There is no god but Me.
So worship Me and perform the formal prayer
of My Remembrance. (20:14)
Truly, the Hour is that which arrives.
I am about to conceal it so that every soul
is given recompense for what it endeavors. (20:15)
*So let none bar **you** from it—whoever believes not in it*
*and followed his own desires—so that **you** not survive.* (20:16)
*And what is that in **your** right hand ,O Moses?* (20:17)
Moses said: This is my staff. I lean on it,
and beat down leaves from a tree with it for my herd of sheep
and for me in it are other uses. (20:18)
He said: Cast it, O Moses! (20:19)
So he cast it. That is when it was a viper sliding. (20:20)
He said: Take it and fear not. We will cause it to return
to its first state. (20:21)
*And clasp **your** hand to **your** armpit.*
It will go forth shimmering white

without any evil as another sign (20:22)
*that We cause **you** to see of Our greater signs.* (20:23)
*Go **you** to Pharaoh! Truly, he was defiant.* (20:24)

The Messengership of Moses

Makkah: *Moses said: My Lord!* (20:25)
Expand my breast for me
*and make **You** my affair easy for me* (20:26)
and untie the knot from my tongue (20:27)
so they understand my saying (20:28)
and assign to me a minister from my people— (20:29)
—Aaron, my brother. (20:30)
Strengthen my vigor with him (20:31)
and ascribe him as a partner in my affair (20:32)
*that we glorify **You** much* (20:33)
*and we remember **You** frequently.* (20:34)
*Truly, **You**, **You** alone had been seeing of us.* (20:35)
*He said: Surely, **you** were given **your** petition, O Moses!* (20:36)

Commentary°

Here, the [signs] demonstrate how God's power intervened right from the outset, but the ultimate victory was only achieved when faith was clearly uppermost in the hearts of those who believed, and when they openly declared the word of truth in the face of ruthless tyranny

At the beginning of the chapter, the Prophet is asked a rhetorical question about whether or not he had heard of Moses' history and how it reflects God's grace and the guidance He provides for those whom He chooses as His Messengers. The signs (20:1-20:24) tell the story of Moses when he leaves Midian to return to Egypt.

Here we see Moses on the road between Midian and Egypt, close to Mount Sinai, returning with his wife after he had completed the term he had agreed with the Prophet Jethro. This agreement meant that Jethro would give him one of his two daughters in marriage in return for eight or ten years during which he would be his assistant. He most probably spent ten years before he felt that he could leave with his wife to return to the country where he grew up. There the Children of Jacob, Moses' people, lived in subjugation.

Why is he returning to Egypt having fled there after killing an Egyptian whom he found quarrelling with one of the Children of Jacob? He had after all found safe refuge with Jethro, his father-in-law. So why would he leave that place of security and return to Egypt? Here we see human homesickness as the tool used by God to

bring Moses to the place where he was to play an important role. Thus is life. We are motivated by feelings, passions, aspirations, hopes and memories, but all these are merely the outward causes of the desired result. They are what we see on the surface, but below them is the will that no sight can see. It is God's will, and He is the Almighty who accomplishes everything He wants.

Thus we see Moses on his way back to Egypt, losing his way in the desert, accompanied only by his wife, and perhaps a servant. He loses his way in the darkness of the night in the open desert. We sense this from the way he says to his companions. (2:10) People living in the desert normally lit their fires on high ground so that those traveling at night could see it, find their way or come over to it where they would find a welcome and hospitality, as well as directions to continue their journey.

Moses saw the fire as he was walking through the desert and he was warmed by hope. He moved towards it in order to fetch a firebrand, as night in the desert is normally cold. He also felt he might find some guidance as to which direction to travel in. He went there to bring back a torch, but was in for a great surprise. For he found the fire that warms souls and spirits, and provides guidance for the greatest journey of all. (20:11-20:16)

This is an awe-inspiring scene. We shudder as we imagine Moses alone in the open desert, engulfed in the complete darkness and silence of the night, making his way towards the fire by the side of the mountain. Then suddenly, the whole universe echoes the great address. (20:12-20:13)

When this announcement of God's honor, reflected in God's selection of Moses as His Messenger is made, he is asked to prepare for what is coming by taking off his sandals. Then he is told to be ready to learn. (20:13)

This was an address to which the whole universe responded. In it, God gave His chosen Messenger the fundamental truth of His Oneness. Moses must have forgotten all about himself and the purpose for which he aimed towards the fire. He was now only following this voice coming to him from on high. He was attentive to the divine instructions being given to him. As he is so absorbed, with his mind and soul fully attentive to it, he is asked a question that requires no answer from him: Now, what is this in your right hand, Moses? (20:17)

Of course Moses had his staff in his hand, but where was his mind at that moment? Well, he remembers and gives his reply. (20:18) The question did not ask about the uses he had for his staff, but rather about the object he was holding

The omnipotent power, however, does with his staff what he could have never imagined. This comes as part of his preparation for his task. (20:19-20:21)

Thus he saw in front of his eyes the great miracle that occurs every moment while people remain oblivious to it. That is the miracle of life: the staff became a rapidly moving snake

The miracle of life took place, and Moses was full of amazement, with fear tearing at his heart. But the command was given. (20:21)

Thus Moses was reassured, he picked up the snake and it was a staff again, regaining its original shape and form

Another command was issued to Moses from on high. (20:22) Moses did as he was told. It should be noted that the Quran uses a different expression to denote the position where Moses was to put his hand, his armpit. It is described as his 'wing' that gives an air of freedom of movement and freedom from the earth's gravity. Thus his hand came out shining white, but its whiteness indicates no illness or malignancy. This is indeed another sign to be added to that of his staff. He is thus made to see some of the great miracles God works out. (20:23) When he has seen these with his own eyes, he will be reassured and able to carry out his great task with greater determination.

Moses Had Killed a Soul

Makkah: *and **you** have killed a soul,*
*but We delivered **you** from lament*
*and We tried **you** with an ordeal.*
*Then,**you** had lingered in expectation years*
among the people of Midian.
*Again, **you** had drawn near*
according to a measure, O Moses! (20:40)
*And I chose **you** for service for Myself.* (20:41)
*Go **you** and **your** brother with My signs*
and you both not be inattentive in My Remembrance. (20:42)
So go both of you to Pharaoh.
Truly, he had become defiant. (20:43)
And both say to him a saying gently,
so that perhaps he will recollect or dread. (20:44)
They both said: Our Lord! Truly, we fear
that he should exceed against us or that he be defiant. (20:45)
He said: Fear not. Truly, I am with both of you.
I hear and I see. (20:46)
So approach you both to him and say:

*Truly, we are Messengers of **your** Lord.*
So send the Children of Jacob with us and punish them not.
*Surely, we drew near **you** with a sign from **your** Lord.*
And peace be to him who followed the guidance. (20:47)
Surely, it was revealed to us
that the punishment is on him who denied
and turned away. (20:48)
He said: Then, who is the Lord of you two, O Moses? (20:49)
So approach you both to him and say:
*Truly, we are Messengers of **your** Lord.*
He said: Our Lord is He Who gave everything its creation;
again, He guided it. (20:50)
Pharaoh said: Then, what of the first generations? (20:51)
Moses said: The knowledge of them is with my Lord in a Book.
My Lord neither goes astray nor forgets. (20:52)
He it is Who assigned for you the earth as a cradle
and threaded ways for you in it
and caused water to descend from heaven.
And We brought out from it diverse pairs of plants: (20:53)
Eat and give attention to your flocks.
Truly, in this are signs for the people imbued with sense. (20:54)

Commentary°

The next favor Moses is reminded of is his escape after having killed a man. (20:40-41) The killing of this man took place some time during Moses' early adult years, having grown up in Pharaoh's palace. He had gone to the market one day and found two people quarreling, one a Child of Jacob the other an Egyptian. The Child of Jacob appealed to him for help, and Moses pushed the Egyptian, but rather too strongly for the latter fell and was killed. Moses did not intend to kill the man, but simply to push him away. When he saw him dead, he was full of grief. It is good to remember here that Moses was brought up under God's own care, right from his early childhood. Therefore, it was only natural that he was filled with remorse, blaming himself for over-reacting. God reminds him here of His favor, as He directed him to seek forgiveness, which alleviated his sorrow.

However, God did not let him simply get away with this without a lesson to learn and benefit from in his future task. Therefore, He set him the test of fearing the consequences of his offense and his subsequent attempt to escape punishment. The test took then another form, forcing him to flee the land where he was born and brought up, departing alone without friend or companion. Moreover, having been brought up in the palace of the greatest ruler of the time, en-

joying every comfort and luxury, he now had to earn a living. Thus, he had to serve others, and work as a shepherd.

At the appointed time, when he attained maturity, after passing the tests to which God subjected him, and when circumstances in Egypt were most suited, with the Children of Jacob subjected to much oppression, Moses was brought in from Midian. He might have thought that he had chosen to travel at that time himself, but the fact of the matter was that stated in the Quranic sign. (20:40) So his return was at a time God had determined as most suitable. (20:41) Thus, Moses was trained and prepared so as to be completely devoted to God's message and to serving His cause. He was purged of all the temptations of this worldly life, so as to be purely dedicated to the task God appointed for him. All that had passed in his life was part of his training to fulfil the mission that was about to be entrusted to him. Here God tells him that neither himself, nor his family, nor anyone else had any claim on his time or services. He was chosen by God for whatever God wanted him to do.

What Moses' statement signifies is that he was not worried about being rejected by Pharaoh and his people; rather, what worried him was that this should happen at a time when he felt ill at ease and when his tongue lacked fluent argument. He suffered from a speech impediment, which he prayed to God to remove it. (20:25-20:28)

Should this difficulty occur while one is speaking, it makes the speaker ill at ease, which in turn makes the impediment worse. Thus, the person suffering from it feels unable to express himself. This becomes a vicious circle and anger inevitably sets in. Therefore, Moses feared that he might suffer this problem when he confronted a despotic tyrant like Pharaoh with God's message. He complains to God of his own weakness, and expresses his fears in respect of delivering his Lord's message. The point of his request is that God include his brother Aaron in carrying out this task. This request does not express any reluctance on Moses' part to carry out God's orders, but reflects his fear of falling short of the task. Aaron is more eloquent, which means that he has an easier temperament. Thus, should Moses suffer a block as he speaks, or should he feel straitened in heart, Aaron could then step in to provide the proper argument. Although Moses prays that God remove his speech impediment, he also requests that Aaron be assigned to help him in the delivery of the divine message.

Thus, God Almighty who has power over all creatures and who creates the universe and all creatures in it, using nothing more than His will to bring them into existence, tells them that He is with them. This should have been sufficient, but God adds to this what increases

their certainty of help. This is evidenced by the fact that He hears all and sees all. What could Pharaoh do against the power of the Almighty, whether in a precipitate reaction or a well considered one?

Coupled with this reassurance Moses and Aaron are given guidance in the form of address they should make to Pharaoh and on how to argue their case. (20:47-20:48)

Thus they should start by stating the foundation of their message. (20:47) This would give him right from the first moment the understanding that it is God who is his and all people's Lord. He is not the Lord of Moses and Aaron, or the Children of Jacob alone. It was a superstition of the days of pagan ignorance that each group of people, or each tribe, had its own deity or deities. Moreover, it was commonly held during some periods of history that Pharaoh was a deity, of godly descent, and as such, he was to be worshipped.

When the basic element of their message was thus outlined, Moses and Aaron explained their immediate concern. (20:47) This was the limit of their message to Pharaoh, to save the Children of Jacob and bring them back to their monotheistic faith. They would then lead them to the blessed land that God had assigned to them for settlement

They further showed Pharaoh a sign to prove that they were telling the truth when they said that they were Messengers from his Lord. (20:47) They follow this with an element of encouragement, hoping that he might respond. (20:47) It might be that when he had listened to this that he would respond to the greeting of peace and accept God's guidance.

They then add an element of implicit warning, in order not to stir his arrogance and hostility. (20:48) It might be that he would decide not to include himself among those who deny the truth and turn away from it.

The chapter paints a vivid picture of the dialogue between Moses and Pharaoh, starting with this question and answer. (20:49-20:50) It is clear that Pharaoh does not wish to acknowledge God's Lordship, which the two Prophets had made clear to him saying they were the Messengers of **your** Lord. Pharaoh realized that Moses was the main advocate of the message. Therefore, he puts his question to him. (20:49) In whose name are you addressing me to demand the release of the Children of Jacob?

Moses replies emphasizing God's attributes of creation, initiation and providing guidance and balance. (20:50)

Here Pharaoh puts another question. (20:51) Where have all those past generations gone? Who was their Lord? What happened to them since they died unaware of the Lord Moses spoke about?

(20:52) Thus Moses refers all this unknown matter to his Lord whose knowledge is perfect, encompassing every single detail of every little creature, and who never forgets anything. It is He alone who knows about all those generations, their past and future. The realm that lies beyond the reach of human perception belongs totally to God, who alone determines the eventual outcome of humanity and their life.

Moses continues to draw Pharaoh's attention to some of the results of God's action in the universe and how these results affect human life. He selects results which could be seen close by, and which were well-known in Egypt with its rich soil, abundant water, and plentiful crops and cattle. (20:53-20:54)

Moses and Pharaoh Dialogue

Makkah: *We created you from it (earth)*
and into it We will cause you to return
and from it We will bring you out another time. (20:55)
And, certainly, We caused Pharaoh to see Our signs—
all of them—but he denied and refused. (20:56)
*He said: Have **you** drawn near us*
*to drive us out of our region with **your** sorcery, O Moses?* (20:57)
*Then, truly, we will bring for **you** sorcery like it.*
*So make something that is promised between us and **you***
*—neither we nor **you** will break it—*
at a mutually agreeable place. (20:58)
Moses said: That promised will be for the Day of Adornment
and let humanity be assembled in the forenoon. (20:59)
So Pharaoh turned away.
Then, he gathered his cunning. After that he approached. (20:60)
Moses said to them: Woe to you!
Devise you not a lie against God
so that He put an end to you with a punishment.
And, surely, he who devised will be frustrated. (20:61)
So they contended between each other about their affair
and they kept secret, conspiring secretly. (20:62)
They said: Truly, these two are the ones who are sorcerers
who want to drive you out
from your region with their sorcery
and take away your most ideal behavior. (20:63)
So summon up your cunning. Again, approach ranged in rows.
And, truly, he who prospered this day is
whoever gained the upper hand. (20:64)
*They said: O Moses! Either **you** will cast or let us*
be the first to cast. (20:65)

He said: Nay! You cast. That is when their ropes and their staffs
seem to him to be,
by their sorcery, as though they are sliding. (20:66)
So Moses sensed awe in himself. (20:67)
*We said: Fear not! Truly, **you**, **you** are lofty! (20:68)*
*And cast what is in **your** right hand.*
It will swallow what they crafted. What they crafted
is not but the cunning of one who is a sorcerer.
And the one who is a sorcerer will not prosper
in whatever he approached. (20:69)
Then, the ones who are sorcerers were cast down,
ones who prostrate themselves.
They said: We believed in the Lord of Aaron and Moses. (20:70)
Pharaoh said: Believed you in Him before I give you permission?
Truly, he is your teacher who taught you the sorcery.
So, certainly, I will cut off your hands
and your feet on opposite sides
and, certainly, I will cause you to be crucified
on the trunks of date palm trees,
and, certainly, you will know which of us
is more severe in punishment and one who endures. (20:71)
*They said: We will never hold **you** in greater favor*
over the clear portents that drew near us
nor over Who originated us.
*So decide whatever **you** will as one who decides.*
***You** will decide not but about this present life.* (20:72)
For us, truly, we believed in our Lord
that He forgive us our transgressions
*and what **you** had compelled us to do because of the sorcery.*
And God is Best of one who endures. (20:73)
Truly, whoever approaches his Lord as one who sins,
then, truly, for him is hell.
Neither will he die in it nor will he live. (20:74)
And whoever approaches Him as one who believes,
who, surely, did as the one in accord with morality,
then, for those, they are of lofty degrees, (20:75)
Gardens of Eden, beneath which rivers run,
ones who will dwell in them forever.
And that is the recompense of whoever purified himself. (20:76)

Commentary°

The chapter continues the reporting of what Moses said, but uses the form of a direct address by God Himself. (20:55-20:56) It is from

this earth, made as a cradle for humanity, and which supports the diverse cultivation of plants for food and grazing, that humanity are created, and to it they shall return and then from it again they are resurrected after death.

The human being is certainly created from the same substance as this earth. All the components of his body are largely the same as the components of the earth. Furthermore, he eats of its produce, drinks its waters, breathes its air, and benefits from it as his cradle. Then, he goes back to it a dead corpse, when his remains become part of its soil and atmosphere. From the earth he is resurrected for a second life, just as he was created for the life of this world

Therefore Moses and Aaron demanded the release of the Children of Jacob. (20:47) His reply to their request was indicative of his fears. (20:57) To Pharaoh, such a release was a step towards ousting him from government.

According to Pharaoh's thinking, Moses made this demand for the release of the Children of Jacob for no other reason, and the only thing he was prepared to put forward in support of his demand was an act of sorcery. It was easy, therefore, to reply to him in kind. (20:58)

With such thinking and motivation, Pharaoh asks Moses to set an appointment which neither shall fail to keep. (20:58) He only asks for the match to be in an open area for the challenge to be seen. (20:58)

Moses accepts Pharaoh's challenge and sets the appointment for a festival day when the people are in the mood to celebrate, gathering in the main squares and open areas. (20:59) Thus he sets the best time when everything is at its clearest and people will be out and about in numbers

In this short sign(20:60) the chapter sums up all that Pharaoh said, the advice he was given by the powerful elite among his government, the discussion with the sorcerers and his encouragement and promises of rich reward to them, as well as the schemes he and his advisers finally plotted. Indeed, this short sign, comprising only six words in the Arabic text, shows three successive movements: first, Pharaoh's withdrawal into his own quarters; second, mapping out his strategy; and third, turning up for the confrontation.

Pharaoh simply stopped arguing. He realized that Moses had the stronger case, supported by the clearest proof, namely, God's signs seen everywhere in the universe, as well as his own two special signs. Therefore, he resorted to an old ploy, often used by tyrants and opponents of God's messages. He pointed an accusing finger at Moses, describing him as a sorcerer, claiming that it was through sorcery

that Moses turned the staff into a snake and made his hand look shining white, without blemish. Magic was the thought presenting itself immediately to Pharaoh, because it was widely practiced in Egypt. The two signs given to Moses seemed, on the surface, similar to magic, which is no more than the deception of the senses that could sometimes lead to false feelings so as to produce tangible effects. Thus, under the influence of magic, a person may see things that are not present, or he may see them in a form other than their own. At times a person who is under a magical spell may be physically and psychologically affected, as though the spell has had its effect on him in reality. But Moses' signs were not of this sort. They were signs given to him by God, the Creator of all things, the One who can bring about both temporary and permanent transformations.

Before the confrontation began, Moses felt that he should give the sorcerers some honest and sincere advice. Thus, he warned them against attributing false fabrications to God. So doing, he hoped that they would accept God's guidance and abandon sorcery, which is blatant falsehood. (20:61)

A sincere piece of advice can touch the hearts of those it addresses. This might have been the case here, for some of the sorcerers were touched by Moses' words and began to have second thoughts. Those who were keen to go through with the showdown however began to argue with them in whispers, fearing that Moses would overhear them. (20:62)

The more hardened of them tried to encourage those who were reluctant, and warned them against a gloomy future under Moses and Aaron. They described the two Prophets as being driven by a desire for power, hoping to rule Egypt and change the faith of its people. To forestall their schemes, they needed to demonstrate their unity and confront them as one body, without hesitation. It was a day of outright and decisive confrontation, and the winner would take all.

One sincere word motivated by faith falls like a powerful explosive in the camp of falsehood. It shakes the hearts of the ungrateful and weakens their ranks. They are no longer sure of their own ability, and they entertain doubts about their own beliefs. Therefore, the doubters needed such encouragement. They were reminded that Moses and Aaron were merely two men, against a much larger group of sorcerers, backed by Pharaoh, his kingdom, wealth and army. They forgot however that Moses and Aaron were supported by God who hears and sees all.

After all this, they came forward, giving Moses the choice. (20:65) This is a challenge aiming to show a united, powerful front and a commendable degree of fairness. Hence, his answer was to ac-

cept the challenge. (20:66) He allowed them to start and produce whatever they wanted so that he could have the final say. And what was the result? They apparently produced a magnificent piece of magic, taking the whole multitude by surprise and even affecting Moses.

The Quranic expression (20:66-20:67) suggests a truly mighty magic, which filled the whole arena. Moses felt fear creep into his heart, even though God was with him hearing and seeing everything as it took place. Needless to say, Moses would not have entertained any fear unless the whole thing was so awesome that for a moment he became oblivious to the fact that he was much stronger. Therefore, he needed reminding that he relied on a much superior power: (20:68-69)

Then Moses threw down his staff. The chapter describes the magnitude of the surprise that then occurred by mentioning how it affected the sorcerers who had come full of hope to win the challenge. Only a few moments earlier, their sorcery, which was of the highest standard, had generated fear among all the spectators, including Moses himself. He, a Messenger of God, thought that their ropes and staffs turned into snakes, alive and moving rapidly.

Now the surprise Moses produced completely transformed their feelings and thoughts. So much so that words could not express their reaction. (20:70) That was like a touch on a very raw nerve, and the whole body is shaken violently. It was like a light being switched on to dispel all darkness. Such power is felt by reawakened hearts, filling them, in a split second, with unshakeable faith

But it was too late for Pharaoh. Faith had touched the hearts of those sorcerers and the small, insignificant person within each of them was now in firm contact with the great source of real power. Therefore, they were now very strong, while all earthly powers were weak. Indeed the whole life on earth is too small when compared to the broad, bright horizons to which those believing hearts now looked up. All that pertains to life on earth is of no consequence. (20:72-20:73)

This is the sort of change faith brings about in the hearts of people who, until a moment earlier, were submissive to Pharaoh, considering their highest achievement to be close to him, receiving his favors. Now they are ready to confront him with a determination that puts his power, throne and wealth in proper perspective. (20:72) Such evidence is much more precious in our view, and God, our Creator, is far dearer to us than anything else. (20:72) This is a challenge to Pharaoh to do his worst. He cannot stop them. (20:72)

These new believers take no notice of a despot's threats, and in-

stead stand up to him with the powerful words of faith. They are profoundly confident, issue a warning based on faith and express their hopes based on a newly-found faith.

The Children of Jacob Follow Moses

Makkah: *And, certainly, We revealed to Moses*
*that set **you** forth with My servants.*
Then, strike for them a dry road in the sea,
neither fearing to be overtaken, nor dreading that. (20:77)
Then, Pharaoh and his army pursued them.
Then, overcame them the water of the sea
by what overcame. (20:78)
And Pharaoh caused his folk to go astray
and he guided them not. (20:79)
O Children of Jacob ! Surely, We rescued you from your enemy
and We appointed someone with you
on the right edge of the mount
and We sent down to you the manna and the quails. (20:80)
Eat from what is good that We provided you,
and be not defiant in it so that My anger not alight on you.
And he on whom My anger alights
surely, will be hurled to ruin. (20:81)
And, truly, I am a Forgiver of whoever repented and believed
and did as one in accord with morality.
Again, he was truly guided. (20:82)
*And what caused **you** to hasten from **your** folk, O Moses?* (20:83)
Moses said: They are those who are close on my footsteps
*and I hastened to **You**, my Lord that I please **you.*** (20:84)
*He said: Then, truly, We tried **your** folk after **you** and the Samaritan caused them to go astray.* (20:85)
Then, Moses returned to his folk enraged, grieved.
He said: O my folk! Promise you
not with your Lord a fairer promise?
Was the compact too long for you to wait?
Or wanted you that the anger of your Lord alight on you,
so you broke what you were to have promised me? (20:86)
*They said: We broke not what was promised to **you***
from what is within our power;
but we were charged with a heavy load
of the adornments of the folk.
Surely, we hurled them because the Samaritan cast. (20:87)
Then, he brought out for them a calf, a lifeless body
that had the lowing sound of flocks.

Then, they said: This is your god and the God of Moses whom he forgot. (20:88)
Then, see they not that it returns not to them a saying and it possesses for them neither hurt nor profit? (20:89)

Commentary°

All we have here is the inspiration given to Moses to depart from Egypt at night with the Children of Jacob, and to strike out for them a dry path across the sea. We see Moses with complete reassurance as he and his followers receive God's care. Thus, he has no fear of his people being overtaken by Pharaoh or of being overwhelmed by the parted sea. God's will which made the sea such a great volume of water with all its characteristics is able to part it for a while to give those believers a dry path through so as to continue their journey

They have passed the danger zone (20:80-20:82) and have surged on towards Mount Sinai, leaving Pharaoh and his army drowned. Their deliverance was a recent event which they remember well, but it is recorded here as a reminder, so that they may give thanks.

The appointment at the right hand side of Mount Sinai is mentioned here as though it is an accomplished event, when it was a meeting for which Moses had to prepare himself for over a period of forty nights. He would then receive the tablets and the laws recorded therein. This was a law to regulate the lives of the people entrusted with a mission in Palestine after their departure from Egypt.

The fact that they were given manna, a sweet type of food that gathers on leaves, and quails, a type of bird that is easy to catch and eat, was another aspect of God's grace, of His taking care of them in the barren desert where they found themselves. God was looking after them, even to the point of providing them with their daily food, and in such a way that required no hard effort.

God reminds them of all these favors and warns them against transgression, in the form of indulgence in physical pleasure and neglect of the duties they left Egypt to fulfill. God is preparing for them an assignment which they must undertake. The Arabic word used here for transgression is the same word that signifies the tyranny they experienced in their very recent past. Therefore, they are warned. (20:81) Pharaoh had thrown himself into such ruin only recently, falling off his throne and drowning in the sea. To experience such ruin is to fall from high, which contrasts with tyranny that exalts the tyrant and assumes for him a high position of power. The Quran here juxtaposes such contrasting elements in word and meaning to achieve both heightened effect and perfect harmony.

With this warning against indulgence in easy pleasures and neglect of the task assigned for them, the door for repentance is left open for anyone who slips so that he may return to the proper path. (20:82)

Thus ends the scene of victory and the comments the chapter has to make on it. The curtains fall and lift again to show us the second scene of an address made directly to God by the side of Mount Sinai.

God has appointed a time for Moses to meet Him at the Mount after forty days, when he would be given the commandments outlining the tasks his people have to fulfil after the victory they were given. Victory carries with it its own responsibilities, as does faith. Therefore, it was necessary for Moses to be psychologically prepared and ready to receive God's commandments.

Thus, Moses went up the Mount, leaving his people at the bottom, after asking his brother Aaron to deputize for him. Moses longed dearly for this encounter, when he would stand in front of his Lord and address Him. He had had this experience once before and was keen to experience it again. Therefore, he made haste to stand in the presence of his Lord. He was however totally unaware of what his people had perpetrated after he had left.

His Lord tells him the news, pointing out what has taken place. The scene is shown to us and we listen to the conversation. (20:83-20:85)

Thus Moses is faced with a terrible shock. He was in haste to meet his Lord, after forty days of diligent preparation, eager to listen to His directives and commandments that would constitute the basis of the new way of life for the Children of Jacob. It was to be a way of life suited for a community that had been freed from the shackles of subjugation so that it would become the bearer of a divine message.

The long period they had spent in subjugation and humiliation under Pharaoh's rule and his idolatrous beliefs had had a damaging effect on the nature of the Children of Jacob. Their ability to withstand the difficulties that attend the fulfilment of a hard task, and to remain true to their promises in the face of hardship, was certainly suspect. Psychologically, they suffered an impairment that made them always keen to have a comfortable life, even if this meant a willingness to be led without troubling to think. No sooner did Moses leave them under Aaron's stewardship than they allowed their faith to collapse at the first hurdle. Hence, they needed repeated tests and trials in a process of psychological rebuilding. The first test to which they were subjected was that of the golden calf that the Samaritan had produced. (20:85) Moses did not know about this test until his

appointment with his Lord.

Thus Moses returned to his people full of wrath and sorrow. (20:86-20:91)

Such was the trial to which the Children of Jacob were put. It is revealed to us as Moses confronts his people. It is not reported in the scene of the meeting between Moses and his Lord. It is left to the scene of inquiry undertaken by Moses upon his return.

Enraged and full of sorrow, Moses asked his people. (20:86) God had promised them victory and to enter the Holy Land as a community believing in His Oneness. Only very recently had they witnessed the initial steps towards the complete fulfilment of this promise. Hence, he remonstrated with them. (20:86) Their action was akin to that perpetrated by one who wants to bring God's condemnation on his head, so he wilfully and deliberately does what incurs it. Moses asked them if this was why they broke their promise to him to maintain the path he had shown them until his return.

They gave him a singular excuse that exposed the effects on their mentality of their long time living in subservience. It is a ludicrous excuse. (20:87)

Again, Moses had not been gone long for the appointment with his Lord to receive the tablets when the Samaritan led them astray as he produced for them the effigy of a calf which made a lowing sound. (20: 88)

The Children of Jacob Deceived by the Samarian

Makkah: *And, certainly, Aaron said to them before:*
O my folk! You were only tempted by it.
And, truly, your Lord is The Merciful.
So follow me and obey my command. (20:90)
They said: We will never quit it as ones who give ourselves up
until Moses returns to us. (20:91)
He said: O Aaron! What prevented ***you***
when ***you*** *had seen them going astray* (20:92)
that ***you*** *have followed me not?*
Have ***you****, then, rebelled against my command?* (20:93)
Aaron said: O son of my mother!
Take me not by my beard nor by my head.
Truly, I dreaded that ***you*** *have said:*
You *had separated and divided between the Children of Jacob*
and ***you*** *have not regarded my saying.* (20:94)
Moses said: Then, what is ***your*** *business O Samaritan?* (20:95)
He said: I kept watch over what they keep not watch,
so I seized a handful of dust from the foot prints

of the Messenger and cast it forth.
And thus my soul enticed me. (20:96)
Moses said: Then go off! Truly for you in this life
is that you may say: Untouchable;
there is for you something promised that you shall never break;
and look on your god that you have stayed with
and given yourself up to;
certainly we will burn it. After that we will certainly scatter it
in the water of the sea in a scattering. (20:97)

Commentary°

Moreover, Aaron, their other Prophet who deputized for his brother Moses, their savior, had given them honest and sincere advice, pointing out to them that it was all a test. (20:90) He assured them that the proper course for them to take was to follow him as they had promised Moses. He told them that Moses was certain to return when his Lord had finished His business with him. Rather than follow his advice, they evaded their responsibility and abandoned their commitment to obey their Prophets. (20:91)

Thus Moses returned, sorrowful and angry. He listened to his people's excuses that revealed the extent of their twisted logic. In his anger, he turned to his brother dragging him by his head and beard, crying in his anger. (20:92-20:93) He scolded him for allowing them to worship the calf without taking effective action to prevent them. But Aaron was merely obeying his brother's orders when he had told him not to do anything serious until he returned. Did Aaron, then, disobey his brother by doing so?

The chapter has already stated Aaron's attitude. Now he explains to his brother what he did, trying to calm his fury and awaken his compassion. He reminds him of their close relationship. (20:94)

Here we find Aaron to be far more in control of his emotions. He touches on a tender point in Moses' feelings, reminding him of their being siblings. He also explains to him that he simply wished to do what his brother had bid him. He feared that should he adopt strong measures the Children of Jacob might split into factions, some worshipping the calf, and others following his advice. Since his brother wanted him to take care of them all, keeping them together, he felt that his attitude was simply one of following the orders he had been given.

Now Moses addresses all his anger to the Samaritan, the perpetrator of the whole trouble. He did not speak to him first because the people themselves should have known better than to follow someone who came up with an outrageous idea. Aaron, as their trusted leader,

was also responsible for making sure that they did not slip, should they be faced with temptation. The Samaritan takes less importance, since he did not use brute force to compel them to follow his lead, nor did he cast a screen over their faculties of thinking. He simply presented a temptation and they fell for it. They could very easily have remained true to the guidance of their first Prophet, Moses, and benefited by the counsel of their second Prophet, Aaron. Hence, responsibility lay with them in the first place, then with their leader, and finally with the perpetrator of the trouble.

(20:95) How come all this has happened because of you? The way the question is phrased is indicative of the seriousness of the whole affair. (20:96)

Be that as it may, Moses punished the Samaritan by expelling him for life from the their community, leaving his destiny in the hereafter to God Almighty. He further took a strong and effective measure concerning the deity he had made with his own hands, aiming to show his people that it was an inanimate object, unable to protect its maker or to save itself. (20:97)

Thus the Samaritan was ostracized: no one could go near him either to harm or benefit him. Nor was he allowed to touch anyone either. This was one of the penalties prescribed in Moses' faith: expelling the offender and ostracizing him to the extent that no one went near him. The other aspect is that of God's punishment at His own time.

Still angry and furious, Moses ordered the calf to be burnt, cast away and its ashes thrown in the sea. Such a strong action seems to be a characteristic of Moses. In this instance, however, his anger is in defense of God's faith. In such a situation, strong action is commendable.

With the false deity being burnt and blown away, Moses declared the basic principle of true faith. (20:98)

With this declaration we come to the end of the story of Moses as related in this chapter. The overriding tone here is that of the grace God bestows on His servants, His care and forgiveness, even when they err.

Moses and Aaron Sent To Pharaoh

Chapter 26: The 47th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And when your Lord proclaimed*
to Moses saying that:
Approach the unjust folk, (26:10)
a folk of Pharaoh saying:
Will they not be God-conscious? (26:11)

He said: My Lord! Truly, I fear that they will deny me (26:12)
and my breast be narrowed and my tongue will not be
loosened. So send for Aaron. (26:13)
And they charge an impiety against me.
I fear that they will kill me. (26:14)
He said: No indeed! Both of you go with Our signs.
Truly, We will be with you, ones who are listening. (26:15)
And both of you approach Pharaoh and say:
We are the Messengers of the Lord of the worlds, (26:16)
so send the Children of Jacob with us. (26:17)
*Pharaoh said: Raise not we **you** up among us as a child?*
*Had **you** not lingered in expectation with us*
*for many years of **your** lifetime?* (26:18)
*And **you** had accomplished **your** accomplishment*
*that **you** had accomplished and **you** are*
among the ones who are ungrateful. (26:19)
Moses said: I accomplished it
when I was of the ones who go astray. (26:20)
So I ran away from you when I feared you.
Then, my Lord bestowed on me critical judgment
and made me among the ones who are sent. (26:21)
*Beyond this past favor with which **you** have*
*reproached me, **you** had enslaved the Children of Jacob.* (26:22)
Pharaoh said: And what is the Lord of the worlds? (26:23)
Moses said: The Lord of the heavens and the earth
and whatever is between the two of them
if you had been ones who are certain. (26:24)
Pharaoh said to whoever was around him:
Listen you not? (26:25)
Moses said: Your Lord and the Lord of your fathers,
the ancient ones. (26:26)
Pharaoh said: Truly, your Messenger
who was sent to you is one who is possessed! (26:27)
Moses said: The Lord of the East and the West
and whatever is between the two of them
if you had been reasonable! (26:28)
*Pharaoh said: If **you** had taken to **yourself** a god other than me.*
*I will, certainly, assign **you** to be imprisoned!* (26:29)
*Moses said: What if I drew near **you***
with something that makes it clear? (26:30)
*Pharaoh said: Bring it, if **you** have been*
among the ones who are sincere. (26:31)
So he cast his staff; that is when it was a clear serpent. (26:32)

And he drew out his hand and that is when it was shimmering white to the ones who look. (26:33)

Commentary°

These two [signs] (26:10-26:11) paint the first scene which shows Moses being given his message. It begins by exposing the people he must go to, declaring that they are 'wrongdoing'. They do themselves a great wrong by denying God's message, and they do much wrong to the Children of Jacob, killing their men but sparing their women and inflicting much torture on them. Therefore, the chapter describes them as wrongdoing before it specifies who they are. It then calls on Moses and all people to wonder at them: Will they have no fear of God? Will they continue to be heedless of the likely outcome of their wrongdoing? Will they not mend their erring ways? Theirs is certainly a singular situation.

(26:14) Again, Moses does not express any fear in confronting Pharaoh with the call to believe in God, nor does he seek to abandon the mission assigned to him; rather, this is all given as an added reason for the need to include Aaron. Should Pharaoh kill Moses, Aaron would be able to carry on the mission and complete the task. Thus, we should read Moses' prayer as a precaution aiming to ensure that the divine message was properly and fully delivered. It is exactly the kind of attitude that can be expected from a Messenger like Moses whom God had chosen and reared under His own watchful eye

Moses and Aaron are told to clearly outline to Pharaoh their assigned mission, fearing nothing and hiding nothing. (26:16)

As Messengers from the Lord of the universe, they make their demands clear: We are Messengers from the Lord of all the worlds. Let the Children of Jacob go with us. (26:16-26:17)

Pharaoh is amazed as Moses makes his unexpected claim to be a Messenger from God, the Lord of the universe. He is further amazed as Moses demands that he free the Children of Jacob. The last thing he knew of Moses was that he was brought up in his palace after being found as a newborn child floating in a basket on the Nile. As a young man he had killed an Egyptian who was involved in a fight with a Child of Jacob and ran away. It is said that the Egyptian he killed belonged to Pharaoh's entourage. This means that there was a huge gap between Moses' status at that time and his new claims which he puts before Pharaoh just a mere ten years later. Hence,

Pharaoh is sarcastic, asking in an affected air of surprise: Did we not bring you up when you were an infant? And did you not stay with us many years of your life? Yet you have done that deed of yours while being an unbeliever. (26:18-26:19) Is this how you repay our

kindness as we looked after you when you were a young child? Is it fair that you come today professing a religion other than ours, rebelling against the authority of the king who brought you up in his palace, and calling on people to abandon his worship?

How come that during all those years you stayed with us you did not mention anything of the wild claims you are now making, giving us no prelude to what was to come? Pharaoh then reminds Moses of the incident leading to the killing of the Egyptian, giving it an air of exaggeration: Yet you have done that deed of yours ... It was a ghastly deed that should never be mentioned or described in real terms. Yet you did it while being an unbeliever. You did not believe then in the Lord of all the worlds, about whom you are now telling us.

Thus we see Pharaoh making what he thought was a final argument and against which Moses would have no reply, especially his killing of an Egyptian and the punishment that could be inflicted on him. His words are clearly meant as an implied threat.

Since God answered his prayer and cured his speech impediment, Moses rejoins with a clear reply: I committed it while I was still going astray; and I fled from you because I feared you. Then my Lord granted me sound judgement and made me one of [His] Messengers. And what sort of favor is this you are taunting me with: was it not because you had enslaved the Children of Jacob? (26: 21-26:22) I did it when I was ignorant, rushing to defend anyone from among my people. This is different from my present commitment to my faith which is based on sound judgement granted me by my Lord. I fled from you because I feared you. But God has been good to me, bestowing on me the gift of wisdom and making me one of His Messengers. I am not a unique phenomenon; rather, one of the chosen group of God's Messengers.

Moses then uses a touch of sarcasm in reply to Pharaoh's own sarcastic remarks, but he only states the truth: What sort of favors is this you are taunting me with: was it not because you had enslaved the Children of Jacob? The fact that I was reared in your palace came about only as a result of your enslavement of the Children of Jacob, and your killing of their children. This was the reason why my mother put me in a basket to float along the Nile. When your people found me, I was brought up in your palace, not in my parents' home. What favor is this that you press against me?

At this point, Pharaoh stops this line of argument and asks Moses for the central point of his claims, but his questioning carries overtones of ridicule and derision aimed at none other than God Himself. Pharaoh said: And what is that 'Lord of all the worlds? (26:23)

How arrogant and insolent! He is saying: what is this Lord of the worlds about whom you describe yourself as His Messenger? Such a question can only mean a denial of the very point it relates to, and a ridicule of the statement and the person making it. He considers the whole situation impossible and unworthy of discussion.

Moses' reply points to God's Lordship over the entire visible universe and all that there is in it: [Moses] answered: He is the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, if you want to be sure. (26:24) Thus, his answer refutes Pharaoh's denial, rendering it worthless. He tells him that God is the Lord of the entire universe which neither Pharaoh's power nor his knowledge can ever reach. The utmost that Pharaoh can boast of is that he is a deity over the people of the Nile Valley and its overall lord. But then this is a tiny little particle when compared to the heavens and the earth and all that is between them. We discern in Moses' answer his dismissal of Pharaoh's claims as vain boasts, turning his attention to the vast universe, inviting him to contemplate its size and the One who is Lord over it all. That is certainly the Lord of all the worlds. He concludes his answer with a comment inviting the people to work for the achievement of certainty: "If you want to be sure."

Pharaoh turns to those around him, expressing amazement at this response. Or maybe he wanted them not to be influenced by it. This is typical of all tyrants who fear that simple words of truth might influence the hearts and minds of the masses: [Pharaoh] said to those around him: Do you hear? (26:25) Do you hear this singular statement which was never uttered by anyone we know?

Moses replies by stressing another attribute of God, the Lord of all creatures: [Moses] said: He is your Lord as well as the Lord of your forefathers of old. (26:26) This answer is directed at Pharaoh, his status and claims even more. He tells him that God, the Lord of all the worlds, is also his Lord, while Pharaoh is nothing more than one of His servants. He is certainly not a deity as he claims. His people are also subject to God, their true Lord, while Pharaoh has no lordship over them. Indeed God is the Lord of their forefathers of old, which means that the hereditary aspect on which Pharaoh's claims rely is false. None other than God has ever been Lord of the worlds.

This hit hard at Pharaoh and he could not remain silent when his elders and nobles were listening. Therefore, he derisively states that his adversary is mad: [Pharaoh] said: Indeed, the Messenger who has been sent to you is, of a certainty, a madman. (26:27) His derision is directed at the very issue of bearing God's message so as to turn people away from it. He charges Moses with madness in order to nullify

the effect of his statement that questions the very basis of Pharaoh's political and religious position, as it aims to remind people of their Lord, the Lord of their forefathers.

Nothing of Pharaoh's derision could weaken Moses and his resolve. Therefore, he continues to state the truth that hits hard at all tyrants: [Moses] went on: He is indeed the Lord of the East and the West and of all that is between them, if you would but use your reason. (26:28) The Arabic words *mashriq* and *maghrib*, used for east and west, also denote the processes of planets and stars rising and setting. These are two great scenes which we see every day, but our minds seldom reflect on them because of over familiarity. These two processes are great indeed, and neither Pharaoh nor any tyrant can claim to have any control over them. Who does, then, control them, setting them in a perfect order and timing that ensures their continuity without fail or deviation? Moses' answer shakes dormant hearts and awakens sleeping souls. In this way, he calls on people to reflect and contemplate, if you would but use your reason.

Pharaoh's Sorcerers Embrace the Truth

Makkah: *He said to the Council around him:*
Truly, this is one who is a knowing sorcerer! (26:34)
He wants to drive you out from your region by his sorcery.
What is it, then, that you suggest? (26:35)
They said: Put him and his brother off
and raise up ones who summon in the cities. (26:36)
They will bring every knowing witch to you. (26:37)
So the ones who were sorcerers were gathered
at a time appointed on a known day (26:38)
and it was said to humanity:
Will you, you be ones who gather together (26:39)
so that perhaps we follow the ones who are sorcerers
if they had been the ones who are victors? (26:40)
So when the ones who are sorcerers drew near,
they said to Pharaoh:
Is there a compensation for us
if we had been the ones who are victors? (26:41)
Pharaoh said: Yes! Truly, you will be
the ones who are brought near to me. (26:42)
Moses said to them: Cast what you will as ones who cast. (26:43)
So they cast their ropes and their staffs and said:
By the vainglory of Pharaoh,
we, we will, surely, be the ones who are victors! (26:44)

Then, Moses cast down his staff.
That is when it swallows what they faked. (26:45)
The ones who are sorcerers were cast down,
ones who prostrate themselves. (26:46)
They said: We believed in the Lord of the worlds, (26:47)
the Lord of Moses and Aaron. (26:48)
Pharaoh said: You believed in him
before I give permission to you?
He is, truly, your foremost master who taught you sorcery.
Then, you will know. I will, certainly, cut off your hands
and your feet on opposite sides,
and I will cause you to be crucified one and all. (26:49)
They said: No grievance.
Truly, to our Lord we are ones who are turning. (26:50)
Truly, we are desirous that Our Lord forgive us our transgressions
that we had been the first of the ones who believe. (26:51)

Moses Rescues the Children of Jacob

Makkah: *And We revealed to Moses saying that:*
Set ***you*** *forth by night with My servants.*
Truly, you are ones who will be followed. (26:52)
Then, Pharaoh sent to the cities, ones who summon. (26:53)
They said: These are, truly, a small crowd (26:54)
and, truly, they are ones who enrage us. (26:55)
We are altogether, truly, ones who are cautious. (26:56)
So We drove them out from the gardens and springs (26:57)
and treasures and a generous station. (26:58)
And We, thus, gave them as inheritance
to the Children of Jacob. (26:59)
So they pursued them at sunrise. (26:60)
Then, when the two multitudes sighted each other,
the Companions of Moses said:
Truly, we are ones who are to be overtaken. (26:61)
Moses said: No indeed. Truly, my Lord is with me
and He will guide me. (26:62)
Then, We revealed to Moses saying that:
Strike the sea with ***your*** *staff*
and it divided and each had been
a separate part like a high, tremendous mountain. (26:63)
And, again, We brought the others close (26:64)
and We rescued Moses and whoever was with him,
one and all. (26:65)

Again, We drowned the others. (26:66)
Truly, in this is a sign
and yet most of them had not been ones who believe. (26:67)
And, truly, your Lord,
He is The Almighty, The Compassionate. (26:68)

The Children of Jacob and the Ancient Scrolls

Chapter 26: The 47th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, truly, it is in the ancient scrolls*
of the ancient ones. (26:196)
Would it not be a sign for them
that is known to the knowing among
the Children of Jacob? (26:197)

Commentary°

This evidence came from within the Quran itself. The chapter, however, also provides further evidence, but this time it is external. (26:196-197) The description of the Messenger who would receive the Quran from on high, and the fundamentals of the faith he would preach were clearly indicated in the scriptures of ancient peoples. Hence, the learned ones among the Children of Jacob were expecting this last message and Messenger.

Moses Commissioned with Messengership

Chapter 27: The 48th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Mention when Moses said to his people:*
Truly, I, I observed a fire!
I will bring you news from it
or I will approach you with a flaming firebrand
so that perhaps you would warm yourselves. (27:7)
But when he drew near it, it was proclaimed that:
Blessed be He Who is in the fire and Who is around it,
and glory be to God, the Lord of the worlds. (27:8)
O Moses! Truly, I alone am God, The Almighty, The Wise. (27:9)
*Cast down **your** staff. But when he saw it quiver*
as if it were a snake,
he turned as one who draws back to retrace his steps.
O Moses! Fear not!
The ones who are sent fear not My nearness (27:10)
but whoever did wrong does.
Again, he substituted goodness after evil
and, truly, I am Forgiving, Compassionate. (27:11)
*Cause **your** hand to enter into **your** bosom.*

It will go forth shimmering white without evil.
These are among nine signs to Pharaoh and his folk.
Truly, they had been a folk, ones who disobey. (27:12)
But when Our signs drew near them, ones who perceive,
they said: This is clear sorcery. (27:13)
And they negated them
—although their souls confessed to them—
out of injustice and self-exaltation.
So look on how had been the Ultimate End
of the ones who make corruption. (27:14)

Commentary°

The chapter does not tell us anything about the many years that separate its first two episodes: namely Moses' birth and rescue and the second showing him as a mature adult in his prime. We do not know what happened after he was restored to his mother for suckling, how he was brought up in Pharaoh's palace, what sort of relation he had with his real mother after he was weaned, what position he had in the palace or outside it when he grew up. Nor are we told anything about Moses' faith during these years, when God took care of him, preparing him, in the midst of Pharaoh's worshippers and priest, for the mission which would, in time, be assigned to him.

I perceive a fire. This is what Moses first said on sighting the fire. The Arabic text uses the verb for 'perceive' that carries connotations of friendliness. Thus, his words sound like: I can see a welcoming fire that should give us some comfort. We can ask directions that should tell us which way to go, and we could get a brand to warm ourselves. As Moses walked towards the fire, he received the call from on high. (27:8-27:9)

In this case the whole thing is given in a nutshell. The emphasis here is laid on the call to Moses and his assignment. (27:10) When he did as he was told and threw down his staff, he saw it come alive, writhing at speed like a small but fast-moving snake. His spontaneous nature caught up with him as he was totally taken by surprise. He could never have thought the staff would be so transformed on simply being thrown down. Hence, he ran away, with no thought of going back to take a further look at this serpent. His whole reaction suggests complete and utter surprise.

Yet he was soon reassured when the call from on high resumed. This now told him of the nature of his assignment. (27:10) He is told that he is entrusted with a message from God, and God's Messengers entertain no fear in the presence of their Lord, as He informs them of their duties. (27:11) Only those who do wrong should be afraid.

However, those of them who replace wrong with good, abandoning injustice, evil and unbelief, making sure to replace them with justice and faith, and doing righteous deeds will receive God's grace and forgiveness.

Moses is now reassured and calm. Therefore, his Lord gives him his second miracle before even telling him about his mission or its nature. (27:12) Again, Moses did as he was told, putting his hand through the top opening of his robe, and then bringing it out brilliant white. He had no skin disease. What happened was another miracle. God promised to support him with nine miraculous signs of the type of which he had just seen two. At this point Moses is also told of his assignment, for which he has been given such preparation. (27:12)

Here, the chapter does not provide any details of these nine signs, though they are mentioned in Chapter 7, The Elevated Places. These were the years of drought, crop shortages, floods, locusts, ants, frogs and blood. The lack of detail in this instance indicates that the emphasis here is on the miraculous nature of these signs, and the stubborn refusal of Pharaoh's people to acknowledge them and take heed. (27:13-14)

The Quran Relates About the Children of Jacob

Makkah: *Truly, this, the Quran,*
relates about the Children of Jacob
and most of what they are at variance in it. (27:76)
And, truly, it is a guidance and a mercy
for the ones who believe. (27:77)
Truly, your Lord will decree between them with His determination.
And He is The Almighty, The Knowing. (27:78)

The Tiding of Moses and Pharaoh

Chapter 28: The 49th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *That are the signs of the clear Book.* (28:2)
We recount to you the tiding of Moses
and Pharaoh with The Truth for a folk who believe. (28:3)
Truly, Pharaoh exalted himself on the earth
and made his people partisans,
taking advantage of due to their weakness,
a section among them. He slaughters their children
and saves alive their women.
Truly, he had been of the ones who make corruption. (28:4)
And We want to show grace to those
who were taken advantage of due to their weakness on the earth
and to make them leaders

and to make them the ones who inherit (28:5)
and to establish them firmly on the earth.
And We cause Pharaoh and Haman to see
—and their armies from them—
that of which they had been fearful. (28:6)
***
And when he was fully grown, come of age
and he straightened himself up, We gave him critical judgment
and knowledge. And, thus,
We give recompense to the ones who are doers of good. (28:14)
And he entered the city at a time of heedlessness of its people.
He found in it two men fighting one against the other.
This who was from among his partisans
and this who was from among his
enemies. The one who was among his partisans cried for help
against him who was among his enemies.
So Moses struck him with his fist
and Moses made an end of him.
He said: This is the action of Satan.
Truly, he is a clear enemy, one who leads astray. (28:15)
He said: My Lord! Truly, I did wrong to myself
so forgive me and He forgave him.
Truly, He is The Forgiving, The Compassionate. (28:16)
He said: My Lord! For that with which
***You** were gracious to me*
I will never be a sustainer of the ones who sin. (28:17)
So he came to be in the morning in the city
one who is fearful and is vigilant.
That is when the one who had asked for help
yesterday cries out aloud to him.
*Moses said to him: Truly, **your** are clearly a hothead.* (28:18)
Then, when he wanted to seize by force
the one who he was an enemy of both of them
*—he said: O Moses! Would **you** want to kill me*
*as **you** had killed a soul yesterday?*
***You** would want nothing,*
but to be haughty on the earth?
*And **you** would want not to be*
among the ones who make things right? (28:19)
A man drew near from the farther part of the city,
coming eagerly,
he said: O Moses! Truly, the Council is conspiring
*against **you** to kill **you**, so go forth.*

Truly, I am the one who gives advice to you. (28:20)
So Moses went forth from there as one who is fearful, is vigilant.
He said: My Lord! Deliver me from the folk,
ones who are unjust. (28:21)

Commentary°

These [signs] (28:2-28:5) then relate the story of Moses and Pharaoh, right from its very first moment, when Moses was born. Although Moses' story is related in many other chapters, it is never recounted from the very beginning anywhere else. It is this very beginning, describing the difficult circumstances in which Moses was born, powerless among a people who had long been persecuted and humiliated by Pharaoh, that serves as the main theme of the chapter. It shows the hand of the divine will working openly, without any apparent human medium, striking directly at the root of tyranny and injustice. It thus gives support and empowerment to the oppressed. This is a concept that the small and weak Muslim minority in Makkah needed to fully understand. It was equally important that the powerful majority be made well aware of it too

The first two episodes, which are mentioned only in this chapter, are treated at length because they bring to the fore the open challenge to aggressive tyranny. We clearly see how Pharaoh is totally unable to evade God's will despite all his precautions and maneuvres. (28:6)

Pharaoh exalted himself in the land. (Verses 28:4-28:6)

Thus the stage is set, and the hand that controls events is shown, together with the goal to be achieved. Declaring to whom this hand belongs right at the outset is intentional and fits the drift of the story from beginning to end.

The chapter is silent on all these points. As it starts its narration of the second episode, we see a fully mature Moses, a man endowed with critical judgment and wisdom, and one granted the reward of righteous people. (28:14)

We are told that he 'entered the city', which we understand as the Egyptian capital. Where had he come from so as to enter the city? Was he in the palace at Ein Shams? Or had he deserted the palace and the capital but came in this time when the people were unaware of his presence? He might have come around noon when people were resting? Anyway, however he arrived, he nonetheless witnessed something not to his liking. (28:15)

One of the two was an Egyptian, said to belong to Pharaoh's staff, with some reports suggesting that he was his cook. The other was a Child of Jacob. The two were fighting as Moses came into the city, and the Child of Jacob appealed to him for help against their

Egyptian enemy. How could this happen? How could a Child of Jacob appeal to Moses, Pharaoh's adopted son against another from Pharaoh's court? This would not have happened if Moses was still residing in the palace, or if he was one of Pharaoh's courtiers. It could only have happened if the Child of Jacob was certain that Moses no longer had any contact with the palace, and that he was in reality a Child of Jacob opposed to Pharaoh and sympathetic to his own people's cause. This last possibility is more in line with Moses' character. For it is unlikely that he would have tolerated life in the corrupt environment of the palace.

(28:15) The Arabic word used for "struck', indicates a punch delivered with the full weight of one's arm. We understand that Moses punched the man only once, and that this caused his death. We thus have an idea of Moses' physical strength, his anger and the strength of his opposition to Pharaoh and those of his court.

However, it appears from the drift of the narrative that Moses did not intend to kill the Egyptian. Indeed, when he saw him lifeless, he regretted what he had done, attributing it to Satan's temptation. His action was the result of anger, and anger is a devil or part of what Satan manipulates. (28:15)

He goes on to show genuine regret for what his anger caused, acknowledging that by so doing, he had wronged himself, had burdened himself with such results. He appealed to God for forgiveness. (28:16) God responded to his prayer, knowing that his repentance was genuine.

It appears that his refined sense indicated to him that God had responded to his appeal and forgiven him. A believer's heart, which has reached such a superior level of sensitivity, feels that his prayer has been answered once it is made. As he felt such acceptance, Moses trembled and made a firm pledge, considering this as part of his gratitude for God's favors. (28:17) This is an absolute pledge and commitment to neither side with nor help wrongdoing people. It is a disavowal of wrongdoing in all shapes and forms, even though the person might feel strongly motivated to give such help by the need to rebel against injustice.

Thus Moses shows both his appreciation of God's favors and his profound sorrow at the injustice he had committed. In all this, we see Moses as a passionate, spontaneous person, capable of reacting strongly to events and situations. Indeed, we will see such aspects of his character in several instances, not least in the very next scene: Next morning, he was in the city, fearful, vigilant, when he saw the man who sought his help the day before again crying out to him for help. But then, when he was about to strike the one who was their

enemy, the latter exclaimed: Moses! Do you want to kill me as you killed another man yesterday? You want only to become a tyrant in the land, and you do not want to be one who sets things right. (28:18-19)

Only a day had passed since the first fight ended with the death of an Egyptian, followed by God's acceptance of Moses' repentance and Moses subsequent pledge never to support wrongdoing. Inevitably, he feared his offense be discovered. We see him on his guard, expecting a reaction at any moment. This again reflects his spontaneous character. We are given the impression that as he walked in the city', which is normally a place of security, he experienced real fear.

That Moses should feel such fear suggests that at this stage he did not have any association with Pharaoh's palace. Under tyranny, it is a trifling matter when anyone close to the palace kills a person. Indeed, such a person would not have entertained any fear, let alone expect any harm to befall him. Yet as he walked vigilantly, Moses looked up and there "he saw the man who sought his help the day before again crying out to him for help." (28:18) The same man is again appealing to Moses for more support, and probably wanting him to do with this one what he did to the other the day before.

The image of the man falling dead only the day before was still vivid in Moses' mind, as was his regret, repentance, and pledge to God. His fear that he may come to harm as a result was also genuinely felt, which explains Moses' outburst accusing the Child of Jacob of being quarrelsome. (28:18) The man appeared to be involved in endless quarrels which inevitably enhanced angry feelings against the Children of Jacob at a time when they could not protect themselves or mount a full- scale revolution. Nothing good could come from such animosity.

Yet Moses was nonetheless full of anger against the Egyptian and moved to strike him as he had the other. This again gives us a glimpse of his passionate and spontaneous personality, of how strongly he was affected by the injustice suffered by the Children of Jacob and how keen he was to do whatever he could to repel aggression.

But then, when he was about to strike the one who was their enemy, the latter exclaimed: Moses! Do you want to kill me as you killed another man yesterday? You want only to become a tyrant in the land, and you do not want to be one who sets things right.' (28:19)

It appears that when the man reminded him of events the day before Moses did not proceed. The Egyptian was spared, left to run off and tell Pharaoh and his men that Moses was the killer. Here again

there is a gap in the story. The next thing we are told of concerns a man hurrying from the farthest end of the city to warn Moses of a plot to do away with him. He further advised Moses that he should flee the city to save his life: (28:20)

This is clearly the work of God's hand. At the right moment, something intervenes to carry out His will. The leading personalities of Pharaoh's government were now aware that Moses was responsible for their compatriot's death. They would have seen this as spelling danger, smacking of rebellion by the Children of Jacob. Hence, Moses needed to be removed. Had it been an ordinary case of murder, it would have not deserved that Pharaoh and his chiefs be preoccupied with it. Therefore, God's hand selected one of those very people to precipitate events. Most probably he was the one believer in Pharaoh's household who had kept his faith secret and who is mentioned in detail in Chapter 40, The Believer. He was chosen to go at speed from the farthest end of the city to warn Moses before Pharaoh's men could reach him. It was a simple warning: "Moses! The nobles are plotting to kill you. So get yourself away. I am giving you sincere advice." (28:20)

Once more we see Moses' spontaneous and passionate personality, as he reacts to different situations. He is in fear, on guard, directly appealing to God for help and protection. He seeks his security with God, prays for His care. (28:21)

Moses Weds Jethro's Daughter

Makkah: *When of his own accord he turned his face*
toward Midian he said:
Perhaps my Lord guides me to the right way. (28:22)
And when he went down to the well of Midian,
he found a community there of personages
drawing water and he found
other than them two women who keep away.
He said: What is your business?
They both said: We draw not water
until the ones who are shepherds move on.
And our father is an aged, old man. (28:23)
So he drew water for them.
Again, he turned away to the shade and said:
My Lord! Truly, I am, certainly, of
whatever ***You*** *caused to descend of good to me, in need.* (28:24)
Then, drew near him one of the two women, walking bashfully.
She said: Truly, my father calls to ***you***
that he may give ***you*** *recompense of compensation*

*because **you** had drawn water for us.*
So when he drew near him and related to him the narrative,
he said: Fear not.
***You** were delivered from the folk, ones who are unjust.* (28:25)
One of the two women said: O my father!
*Employ him. Truly, best is that **you** would employ*
the strong, the trustworthy. (28:26)
*He said: Truly I want to wed **you** to one of my two daughters if **you***
*were to hire **yourself** to me for eight years. But if **you** fulfill ten*
*years, then it will be from **you**. For I want not to press **you** hard.*
***You** will find me, had God willed, among the ones who are*
in accord with morality. (28:27)
*He said: That is between **you** and between me*
whichever of the two terms I satisfied.
There will be no deep seated dislike from me.
And God is Trustee over what we say. (28:28)

Commentary°

The chapter follows him as he stealthily leaves the city, keeping on the alert, alone with no support other than what he hopes to receive from God Almighty. (28:22)

Again we note certain prominent traits in Moses' personality as he moves quickly along a desert road, trying to evade his chasers. He aims for Midian, which is to the north of Hijaz in the Arabian Peninsula and to the south of Syria and Palestine. It is a very long journey, one which he undertakes with little preparedness. At the same time, we note how he is full of faith, surrendering himself to God, seeking His guidance. (28:22)

His long trek had taken him to Midian, tired and exhausted. Yet the scene before him is one that a person with sound moral sense cannot condone. Moses sees many herdsmen and shepherds bringing their cattle and sheep to drink at the water, but two women stand aside, prevented from watering their flock. Those with a good sense of integrity and morality would have allowed the two women to water their sheep first and then leave before the men took care of their cattle. Despite his exhaustion, Moses, the stranger, could not accept what he saw. He stepped forward to ask the two women. (28:23)

They appraised him of their situation. (28:23) As women, they could not fend for themselves in the midst of so many men. Furthermore, their father was an old man who could not compete with younger and stronger men. Moses' sense of fairness could not abide this. He stepped forward to put things right. He watered their flock

for them before the rest, as honorable people should have done in the first place. He does not stop to consider his own position first, as a runaway in a place where he knows no one and where he has no support. Yet nothing stops him from acting as the honorable man he is.

(28:24) This testifies to his noble soul, one reared under God's watchful eye. It also speaks of his physical strength, something that makes him feared even when exhausted by his long trek. It might be his mental rather than physical power that made the other shepherds hold him in awe. People are normally more affected by spiritual strength.

This suggests that it was the hot season when Moses undertook his long journey. And then he sends a prayer. (28:24) He seeks the physical shade to rest his tired limbs. He seeks the great shade spread by God, whose generosity is unlimited, to comfort his heart and soul. This is the essence of his prayer. (28:24) In my weakness in this lonely, hot place where I am a stranger, I am, my Lord, in dire need of Your kind help and endless favors. This whispered, passionate prayer reflects the warmth of Moses' heart and his confident pursuit of God's kindness. It tells us of the strong bond Moses feels with his Lord.

We have barely had time to absorb Moses' passionate prayer when the chapter quickly moves on to the next scene that ushers in an end to his troubles. It is as if the heavens rush to respond to Moses' prayer.

One of the two women then came back to him, walking shyly. (28:25) It is a quick rescue granted by God. It comes in the form of an invitation sent by the old man, who wants to extend his hospitality to Moses for his noble action .

Moses was in need of security, as also of something to eat and drink, but his need for the former was stronger. Hence, the account given in the chapter emphasizes this, making the first words the old man says in comment to Moses' story: Have no fear. He wanted him to feel at ease by dispelling his fear. He then explains: You are now safe from those wrongdoing folk. (28:25) They have no authority over Midian.

One of them advises her father to hire him so that he would spare her and her sister the trouble of doing a shepherd's work. She commends him for his ability to do the work as also his honesty and integrity. As she gives this advice, she speaks clearly, without hesitation, fearing no misunderstanding or unworthy suggestion.

The old man acted on his daughter's advice [He suggests] Moses that he marries one of his daughters in return for eight years work.

Should Moses increase the period to ten years, this would be an added favor, not a commitment to which he would be held. (28:27)

Moses accepted the offer, and the contract was made, clear and precise, with God as a witness. (28:28)

Contractual agreements must be made in all clarity, leaving no room for ambiguity. Neither parry should allow shyness or embarrassment to interfere with such purpose. (28:28)

Thus Moses found a place of security in his father-in-law's home, having no fear of Pharaoh and his designs. This was certainly for a definite purpose God wanted to accomplish. We will now let this episode pass, as the chapter does not state anything further about it

When Moses had fulfilled his term, and was travelling with his family, he perceived a fire on the slope of Mount Sinai. So he said to his family: Wait here, for I perceive a fire. Perhaps I may bring you from there some information, or a burning brand from the fire so that you may warm yourselves

Moses Commissioned with Messengership

Makkah: *Then, when Moses satisfied the term*
and journeyed with his people,
he observed at the edge of the mount a fire.
He said to his people: Abide!
Truly, I, I observed a fire so that perhaps I will bring you
some news from there or burning wood of fire
so that perhaps you will warm yourselves. (28:29)
So when he approached it,
it was proclaimed from the right side of the ridge of the valley,
in a corner of the blessed ground from the tree:
O Moses! Truly, I am God, the Lord of the worlds. (28:30)
*Cast **your** staff. But when he saw it quiver*
as if it were a snake, he turned as one who draws back
and he retraces his steps.
O Moses! Come forward and fear not.
*Truly, **you** are among the ones who are safe.* (28:31)
*Insert **your** hand into **your** bosom.*
It will go forth shimmering white without evil
*and clasp **your** arm pits against fright.*
*These are two proofs from **your** Lord to Pharaoh and his Council.*
Truly, they had been a folk, ones who disobey. (28:32)
He said: My Lord! Truly, I killed a soul among them
and I fear that they will kill me. (28:33)

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Then, when Moses drew near them with Our signs,
clear portents, they said: This is nothing but forged sorcery.
We heard not of this from our
fathers, the ancient ones. (28:36)
Moses said: My Lord is greater in knowledge of who drew near
with guidance from Him
and what will be the Ultimate End in the Abode.
Truly, the ones who are unjust will not prosper. (28:37)
And Pharaoh said: O Council! I knew not of any god for you
other than me so kindle for me, O Haman, a fire on the clay
and make a pavilion for me so that perhaps I will peruse the God
of Moses. And, truly, I think that
he is among the ones who lie. (28:38)
And he grew arrogant, he and his armies,
on the earth without right
and they thought that they would not be returned to Us. (28:39)
So We took him and his armies
and We cast them forth in the water of the sea.
So look on how had been the Ultimate End
of the ones who are unjust. (28:40)
We made them leaders.
They call to the fire. And on the Day of Resurrection,
they will not be helped. (28:41)
And a curse pursued them in the present.
And on the Day of Resurrection
they will be of the ones who are spurned. (28:42)

Commentary°

When Moses had fulfilled his term, and was traveling with his family, he perceived a fire on the slope of Mount Sinai. So he said to his family: Wait here, for I perceive a fire. Perhaps I may bring you from there some information, or a burning brand from the fire so that you may warm yourselves. (28:29)

The second scene tells us of the great surprise prepared for Moses. (28:30) We see him aiming towards the fire, and on the right bank of the valley. From here on this site is blessed. The whole universe now echoes the sublime address Moses receives "out of the tree', which might have been the only tree there

Moses received the direct call. (28:30)

God then continued to give His instructions: "Throw down your staff?" (28:31) Moses complied with the order, throwing down his staff. Only now it was no longer his staff but instead a writhing serpent, which was large in size but moving very fast. (28:31) Moses was totally unprepared for this. Taken aback, he turned and set to

flight. He did not even think of going back to find out what had happened to his staff, or to better see this preternatural happening. Such is the natural reaction of spontaneous people

He is told to come near and to have no fear. Needless to say, a person whose every step is watched over by God will always be safe and secure. (28:32) Again Moses did as he was instructed, putting his hand inside his garment's top opening. Drawing it out, he received yet another shock. His hand was now a shining white, though clearly healthy. Its original color would have been rather dark, weathered by the sun and elements. This change of color thus symbolized the clear truth: one supported by undeniable, irrefutable evidence.

Again Moses' spontaneous personality caught up with him as he trembled, struck with awe. But God's care was soon forthcoming, giving him another instruction so as to calm him down. (28:32)

So Moses has now been given clear signs, causing him fear at first before he was reassured. Now it is time he learned of what lay ahead of him. (28:32) He is given a message to deliver to Pharaoh and his lieutenants, in fulfillment of the promise his mother was given when he was still a newborn baby. (28:7) Despite the passage of many years, the promise has remained true, given by God who always speaks the truth.

Moses now remembers that he had killed one of Pharaoh's entourage and that he had to flee Egypt in order to save himself. As he was in the presence of his Lord who had honored him beyond his wildest expectations, even to the point of meeting Him and being given clear signs, he felt the need to take precautions so that his message should not be brought to an abrupt end if he himself was killed. (28:33)

The chapter delivers its final strike very quickly, making no mention of the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh's sorcerers: such details can be found in brief or in detail in other chapters. Here the chapter moves from the denial of the truth by Pharaoh and his people directly to their destruction. It also includes what will happen to them in the hereafter. This quick movement is deliberate, so as to fit with the general drift of the chapter emphasizing God's direct intervention, through no human agent. Once Pharaoh is seen to be adamant in his rejection of God's message, his end is directly shown. No further details are needed. (28:36)

Moses (peace be upon him) refers the matter to God, because in such a situation where no proof is being requested, it is better to be brief and let God judge between the two parties. (Verse 28:37)

Thus, Pharaoh instructed Haman, his minister, to build him a very high tower so that he might climb and look into the heavens

searching for Moses' God. He also added: I am convinced he is lying. Thus, goodly seemed to Pharaoh the evil of his deed, and he was barred from the right path." (28:37) He deserved to be so barred, having chosen to persist with falsehood and deviancy. The surah's comment makes clear that such scheming can only lead to failure and utter loss. "Pharaohs scheming led only to ruin." (28:37)

Now Pharaoh met his end. (28:39) Given they thought they would never return, they behaved arrogantly, against all right, denying God's signs and warnings. Hence, God's punishment was quick. (28:40) Pharaoh was seized with force and cast into the sea as though he was a little stone

Another glance and this whole world is passed by so as to present a picture of Pharaoh and his hosts on the Day of Judgment calling on people and leading them into hell. (28:41) Evil is the leadership, and evil is the call. (28:41) It is a defeat in this life and a defeat in the life to come, in fair requital for their aggression and transgression. But they will not only be defeated; they are cursed in this world and spurned in the next. (28:42)

Moses' Mission Referred To

Makkah: *And, certainly, We gave Moses the Book,*
after We caused previous generations to perish
as clear evidence
for humanity and a guidance
and a mercy so that they recollect. (28:43)
*And **you** had not been on the western edge*
when We decreed the command to Moses
*and **you** had not been*
among the ones who bear witness. (28:44)
But We caused generations to grow
and their lifetimes continued to be long.
*And **you** had not been one who is a dweller*
with the people of Midian
who recount Our signs to them,
but it is We Who had been ones who send. (28:45)
*And **you** had not been at the edge of the mount*
when We proclaimed,
*but as a mercy from **your** Lord, that **you** were to warn a folk*
*to whom no warner approached them before **you***
so that perhaps they will recollect. (28:46)

Commentary°

The chapter leaves out the entire history of the Children of

Jacob's departure from Egypt, and the events that followed, in order to mention Moses' lot after having shown us Pharaoh's. (28:43)

This is certainly a great favor given to Moses. His is an honorable bequest: a book revealed to him by God in order to give humanity new insight and guidance into what is right. Believers must, however, remember how God's power intervened to save the weak and overcome the powerful. They must reflect on how oppressors are destroyed and the oppressed avenged and given power.

Korah's (Qarun) Ruin

Makkah: *Truly, Korah had been of the folk of Moses,*
but he was insolent towards them.
And We gave him of the treasures which truly,
the keys of it were a heavy ordeal to many imbued with strength.
Mention when His folk said to him: Exult not.
Truly, God loves not the exultant. (28:76)
*Look for what God gave **you** for the Last Abode.*
*And forget not **your** share of the present*
*and do good even as God did good to **you**.*
And be not insolent, corrupting in and on the earth.
Truly, God loves not the ones who make corruption. (28:77)
Korah said: I was only given it
because of the knowledge with me.
Knows he not that God caused to perish before him
some of the generations
who were more vigorous in strength than he
and more numerous in multitude
yet the ones who sin will not be asked
about their impieties? (28:78)
So he went forth to his folk in his adornment.
And said those who want this present life:
O would that we had the like of what was given to Korah!
Truly, he is the possessor of a sublime allotment. (28:79)
And those who were given the knowledge said:
Woe to you! The reward for good deeds from God is
better for whoever believed
and did as ones in accord with morality.
And none will be in receipt of it,
but the ones who remain steadfast. (28:80)
So We caused to swallow him the earth and his abode!
Then, there had been not any faction to help him against God.
And he had been of the ones who are helpless. (28:81)
And it came to be in the morning

those who had coveted his place but yesterday, say:
God extends the provision to whomever He wills of His servants
and confines it to whomever He wills.
Were it not that God showed grace to us,
He would have caused the earth to swallow us;
O how the ones who are ungrateful will not prosper! (28:82)

Commentary°

Korah was one of the people of Moses, but he treated them unjustly. We had granted him such treasures that their very keys would have been too heavy a burden for a band of strong men. His people said to him: Do not exult [in your riches]; for God does not love those who are exultant. Seek instead, by means of what God has granted you, the good of the life to come, without forgetting your rightful share in this world; and do good just as God has done good to you, and do not seek to spread corruption on earth; for God does not love the ones who spread corruption.'

Answered he: I have been given this wealth only by virtue of the knowledge that I have. (28:76-28:78)

This is how the story begins, naming its main character, Korah, and his community, "the people of Moses", as well as the way he treated his people, which was unjust. It also tells us right at the very start the reason for such injustice, namely wealth. (28:76) It goes on to explain the events, statements and reactions involved.

And so he went forth before his people in all his pomp. Those who cared only for the life of this world. (28:79-28:80)

Here, we see some people infatuated with the luxuries that the present life can offer, ready to do what they can in order to have their share of it. Others feel that faith is a greater blessing, and hope for God's reward. Thus the value of wealth is set side by side with the value of faith. (28:79)

When the attraction of material splendor and pomp is at its greatest, God intervenes in order to end the test and save the weaker elements of the community from such temptation. Thus arrogance is utterly destroyed in the third, decisive scene of this story. Then We caused the earth to swallow him, together with his dwelling. He had none to give him support against God, nor was he able to protect himself. (28:81)

Moses Given the Book

Chapter 17: The 50th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And We gave Moses the Book*

and made it a guidance for the Children of Jacob
Take not to yourselves a Trustee other than Me. (17:2)

Children of Jacob Punished

Makkah: *And We decreed for the Children of Jacob in the Book:*
Certainly, you will make corruption in and on the earth two times.
And, certainly, you will exalt yourselves
in a great self-exaltation. (17:4)
So when the promise drew near for the first of the two,
We raised up against you servants of Ours
imbued with severe might.
They ransacked in the midst of your abodes.
And the promise had been one that is accomplished. (17:5)
Again, We returned to you a turn of luck over them
and We furnished you relief with children and wealth
and made you more in soldiery: (17:6)
If you did good, you would be doing good for yourselves.
And if you did evil, then, it is against yourselves.
Then, when the last promise drew near, We sent your enemies;
they raise anger on your faces
and they enter the place of prostration
just as they entered it the first time,
to shatter all that they ascended to with a shattering. (17:7)
Perhaps your Lord will have mercy on you
But if you reverted, We will revert.
And We made hell a jail for the ones who are ungrateful. (17:8)

Commentary°

In the book which God gave Moses to serve as a source of guidance to the Children of Jacob, He issued them with a warning that they would be doomed to destruction should they spread corruption on earth. The destruction was visited on them twice because its causes were repeated. This is followed by a warning of further episodes of destruction should they revert to their old ways of spreading corruption. This leads to the inevitable operation of God's laws of nature that never fail.

Moses Given Nine Signs

Makkah: *And, certainly, We gave Moses nine signs,*
clear portents.
Then, ask the Children of Jacob when he drew near them.
Then Pharaoh said to him: Truly, O Moses,

*I think that **you** are one who is bewitched.* (17:101)
*He said: Certainly, **you** knew no one caused these to descend*
but the Lord of the heavens and the earth as clear evidence.
And, truly, O Pharaoh, I think that
you be one who is accursed. (17:102)
So he wanted to hound them in the region,
but We drowned him
and those who were with him altogether. (17:103)
And We said to the Children of Jacob after him:
Inhabit the region.
So when drew near the promise of the world to come,
We will bring you about a mixed group. (17:104)

Commentary°

Miracles do not initiate faith in hardened hearts. Moses, for example, was given nine such clear signs, but Pharaoh and his people denied them until they suffered God's punishment. (17:101-17:104) This part of the history of Moses and the Children of Jacob is mentioned here because it fits with the context of the chapter. It started by mentioning the Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem, and it then related a part of the history of the Children of Jacob with Moses. This is followed by mentioning the hereafter when Pharaoh and his people will be brought forward. This also fits with the scene of the hereafter and the one showing the end of those who deny resurrection, mentioned a little earlier in the chapter.

Moses' nine clear signs to which the chapter refers were his hand turning white, his staff, and the tests to which Pharaoh's people were subjected, such as drought, shortage of fruit, floods, locusts, ants, frogs and blood. (17:101) Thus the word of truth assigning divinity to God alone, and the call to abandon all injustice and tyranny cannot he uttered, according to the tyrant, except by someone bewitched, unable to realize the meaning of what he says. Indeed tyrants like Pharaoh cannot imagine that anyone in his right senses could ever adopt such an attitude or give expression to such demands.

Moses, on the other hand, realizes that his strength is based in the truth he preaches. His message stands out as a source of light. He is certain of God's support and that He will inevitably punish the tyrants. (17:102) Moses makes it clear to Pharaoh that his denial of the truth when he is fully aware that none other than God could have accomplished such clear signs will earn him a terrible punishment. These signs were clear for anyone who cared to look. They show the truth in full light, clear as the bright day. Yet Pharaoh chose to deny them all and deny God. Hence, divine justice will inflict on him a

punishment that leaves him utterly ruined.

At this point, the tyrannical Pharaoh resorts to his own material force, threatening to wipe Moses and his followers off the face of the earth. Such is the method to which all tyrants resort when they are faced with the truth. But God's will is triumphant. His law of punishing the oppressors and supporting the oppressed comes into force. (17:103-104)

Thus was the end of those who denied the clear signs that were shown to them as evidence of the truth. God gave the land to the oppressed to rule. When they are in charge, their actions will be the basis of the judgment they have to face. At the beginning of the chapter we were given a clear idea of their end. Here we are only told that both they and their enemies will be gathered together on the Day of Judgment. (17:104)

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The Messages of Moses Referred to

Chapter 10: The 51st Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Again, We raised up after them*
Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh and his Council with Our signs.
Then, they grew arrogant,
and they had been a folk, ones who sin. (10:75)
So when The Truth drew near them from Us,

they said: Truly, this is clear sorcery! (10:76)
Moses said: Say you this about The Truth when it drew near you?
Is this sorcery?
And the ones who are sorcerers will not prosper. (10:77)
They said: Had you drawn near to us
to turn us from what we found our fathers on
so that the domination on the earth might be for you two?
We are not ones who believe in both of you. (10:78)
And Pharaoh said: Bring to me
every one who is a knowing sorcerer. (10:79)
And when the ones who are sorcerers drew near,
Moses said to them: Cast down with ones who cast. (10:80)
Then, when they cast Moses said:
What you brought about is sorcery.
Truly, God will render it untrue.
Truly, God makes not right the actions
of the ones who make corruption. (10:81)
And God will verify The Truth by His Words,
although the ones who sin disliked it much! (10:82)

Commentary°

The part of the story related here highlights five points before making a comment elucidating the purpose of relating it in this way. The five points are given in quick succession as follows: Then after those [Prophets] We sent Moses and Aaron with Our signs to Pharaoh and his nobles, but they persisted in their arrogance, for they were hardened offenders. When the truth came to them from Us, they said: This is clearly nothing but sorcery. Moses replied: Do you say this to the truth when it has come to you? Can this be sorcery? But sorcerers will never be successful. They said: Have you come to turn us away from what we found our forefathers believing in, so that the two of you might become supreme in the land? We will never believe in you. (10:75-10:78)

The signs which Moses brought to Pharaoh and his nobles are the nine mentioned in Chapter 7, The Heights. They are not mentioned here in detail because the context does not require such detail. What is important in the present context is the attitude of Pharaoh and his group when they received these signs. (10:75)

The source of these signs is emphasized here, "from Us', (10: 76) to show clearly their terrible offense when they describe as 'clear sorcery' the truth sent to them by God

A part of Moses' first objection is deleted (10:77) because it is indicated by his second one. It is as if he said to them: "Do you say

to the truth when it has come to you that it is sorcery? Can this be sorcery? The first question expresses horror that the truth is described as sorcery, and the second wonders that anyone should actually say it is so. Sorcery does not aim to provide guidance to people, and it does not include a faith or a clear idea about Godhead and His relationship with His servants. It cannot outline a code of living. Indeed sorcery cannot be confused with God's message. No sorcerer ever intended to work for such objectives or move in such a direction. Sorcerers' work is all false, playing tricks on people's imagination. Hence they cannot be successful.

At this point, the nobles supporting Pharaoh reveal their true motives for rejecting the truth: They said: Have you come to turn us away from what we found our forefathers believing in, so that the two of you might become supreme in the land? We will never believe in you. (10:78)

They feared that the new call would destroy their inherited beliefs which formed the foundation of their political and economic systems. They feared that they would lose their power that was conferred on them by the superstitious beliefs they promoted

Then Pharaoh commanded: Bring before me every learned sorcerer. And when the sorcerers came, Moses said to them: Throw whatever you may wish to throw. And when they had thrown, Moses said to them: What you have contrived is mere sorcery which God will certainly bring to nothing. God does not further the work of those who spread corruption. By His words, God proves the truth to be true, much as the guilty may dislike it. (10:79-10:82)

Moses Takes Away the Children of Jacob

Makkah: *But none believed Moses*
but the offspring of his folk because of the fear of Pharaoh
and his Council that he persecute them.
And, truly, Pharaoh was one who exalted himself on the earth.
And he was, truly, of the ones who are excessive. (10:83)
And Moses said: O my folk! If you had been believing in God,
then, put your trust in Him,
if you had been ones who submit to God. (10:84)
Then, they said: We put our trust in God. Our Lord!
Make us not a temptation for the folk,
the ones who are unjust. (10:85)
And deliver us by Your Mercy from the folk,
the ones who are ungrateful. (10:86)
And We revealed to Moses and his brother:
Take as your dwellings,

houses for your folk in Egypt.
Make your houses a direction of formal prayer.
And perform the formal prayer.
And give good tidings to the ones who believe. (10:87)
*And Moses said: Our Lord! **You** had given to Pharaoh*
and his Council adornment and wealth in this present life.
*Our Lord! Cause them to go astray from **Your** way.*
Our Lord! Obliterate their wealth
and harden their hearts so that they believe not
until they consider the painful punishment. (10:88)
He said: Surely, you both were answered,
so go straight both of you
and follow not the way of those who know not. (10:89)
And Pharaoh and his army pursued them in insolence
and acting impulsively until when, overtaken by drowning,
he said: I believed that there is no god but He
in Whom the Children of Jacob believed
and I am among ones who submit to God. (10:90)
*It was said: Now, surely, **you** had rebelled before*
and had been among the ones who make corruption. (10:91)
*On this day We will deliver **you** with **your** physical form*
*that **you** be a sign to whoever is after **you**.*
And, truly, many among humanity
are ones who are heedless of Our signs. (10:92)

Commentary°

Here the curtains are drawn, and when they are lifted again we see Moses with those who accepted his message and believed with him. They are a small group of people. This is one of the lessons to be drawn here (10:83-10:87)

In such a situation the only course is to rely on faith in order to dispel worries and reassure people, helping them to stick to the truth they have recognized. (10:84)

The next sign adds a prayer that is even clearer with regard to the desired outcome. (10:86) These prayers do not conflict with placing their trust in God and seeking His support. Indeed they make such reliance on Him clearer. A believer does not wish for hardship and does not aspire to be the victim of tyranny, but when he is tested by what tyrants do to him, he remains steadfast.

Thus, the two lines were drawn and the two communities were clearly identified. Some people responded positively to Moses. God then advised him and his brother, the Prophet Aaron, to choose special houses for the Children of Jacob, so that they would be ready to

leave Egypt at the appointed time. He also instructed them to purify their homes and their bodies, and to trust to God. (10:87)

Having despaired of any positive response from Pharaoh and his nobles, Moses turned to his Lord with a supplication that He destroy the Egyptians' property and riches because these had lured them away from the truth, so compromising their faith. Thus they had sunk deep into error. He further prayed that the rich remain hardened in their disbelief, so that they would face a grievous punishment. God answered his supplication. (10:88-89)

Moses begins his prayer with a statement. (10:88)

He replied: Your prayer is accepted. (10:89) That then brings the matter to its due end. Continue, both of you, steadfastly on the right path. (10:89) Follow that path until the end, paying no regard to anything different. Do not follow the path of those who are devoid of knowledge. (10:89) Such people move along without guidance.

Their plans are flawed, and they lack certainty. Therefore, they are worried about their destiny, unsure of the path they follow.

The next scene depicts the event as it actually happened. (10:90-10:92) The story is meant, then, to confirm and assert the warnings. (10:90) They managed to cross it under Our guidance and protection. This statement, coming at this point, and attributing the guidance to God alone, is highly significant. They were not chasing them to follow their suit and accept divine guidance, nor was the chasing in defense of any rightful claim they might have had, but was rather an act of aggression and tyranny. Then, in no time at all, the story moves from a scene of brute tyrannical force to one of drowning. (10:91-10:92)

But the response he received came as a total shock, as God said to him: Only now? But before this you were rebelling [against Us], and you spread corruption in the land. (10:91) You believe now, when you no longer have any choice or means of escape? You have been arrogant in your disbelief, rejecting all messages and warnings. But today We shall save only your body. (10:92) His body would remain intact, uneaten by sharks or other sea creatures. It would not be allowed to drift with the waves, but would be saved so that his end would be known to all and sundry: So that you may become a sign to those who will come after you. (10:92) It may be that when others see your body they will take heed and realize that defying God and His warnings brings certain doom. The fact is that a great many people do not heed Our signs. (10:92) They do not turn to them with open hearts and minds, nor do they consider their significance, be they evident in the great universe or within their own selves.

The Children of Jacob at Variance

Makkah: *And, certainly, We placed the Children of Jacob in*
a sound place of settlement and
provided them with what is good.
And they are not at variance
until the knowledge drew near them.
*Truly, **your** Lord will decree between them*
on the Day of Resurrection about
what they had been at variance in it. (10:93)

Commentary°

The final scene in this tragedy of corruption, defiance, disobedience and tyranny is clearly shown and the curtains are drawn. The chapter then continues with a brief statement of what happened to the Children of Jacob over several generations. (10:93)

The Message of Moses

Chapter 11: The 52nd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We sent Moses with Our signs*
and a clear authority (11:96)
to Pharaoh and his Council
but they followed the command of Pharaoh.
And the command of Pharaoh was not well-intended. (11:97)
He will go before his folk on the Day of
Resurrection and they will be led down into the fire.
Miserable will be the watering place,
that to which they are led down! (11:98)
And they were pursued by a curse in this lif
and on the Day of Resurrection!
Miserable will be, the oblation, that which is offered! (11:99)
That is from the tidings of the towns
*that We relate to **you**.*
Of them, some are ones that are standing up
and some are stubble. (11:100)

***

And, certainly, We gave Moses the Book,
but they were at variance about it.
*And if it were not for a Word that preceded from **your** Lord,*
it would be decided between them.
And, truly, they were uncertain about it,
ones in grave doubt. (11:110)

Commentary°

In the series of historical accounts given in this chapter, the final reference is made to Moses and Pharaoh. We have here only a very brief account with several references to the details of the story, but no specifics are given here. The end which Pharaoh and his people met is recorded, along with a very vivid and real scene of the Day of Resurrection. We also have a statement of a basic Islamic principle whereby individual responsibility cannot be overlooked simply because the individual concerned chooses to follow his master or ruler.

The account given here opens with God's sending Moses to Pharaoh, the great ruler of Egypt, and the chiefs of his government. God gives Moses strength and clear authority. (11:96-11:97) No details are given before the end is stated. The people simply obeyed Pharaoh and disobeyed God, despite all the stupidity, short- sightedness and excesses which characterized all that Pharaoh had done. (11:97)

The people chose to follow Pharaoh blindly, without stopping to think whether he guided them rightly or not. They degraded themselves and trampled over their own freedom and the will with which God had endowed them. Hence, it was only natural, as the Quran states, that Pharaoh will lead them on the Day of Resurrection, and that they will follow him. (11:98)

We have so far been listening to a story that happened in the past and to a promise which will be realized in the future. The scene, however, changes here and what was to be the future is now past. Pharaoh has led his people to hell, and the matter is over: "leading them to the fire." (11:98) He has led them like a shepherd leads his flock. After all, they were sheep moving blindly. They have foregone the very basic essential of humanity, namely, the freedom of choice. He has led them to hell. The Arabic expression used here has the added connotation of aiming to lead them to a fountain where they can drink. What a drink they will have, which satisfies no thirst. (11:98)

We note here that all this, the leadership of Pharaoh, and their destination to which he has led them took place a long time ago. A comment is made on it, followed by ridicule. (11:99)

The curse followed them in this life and will be sure to follow them on the Day of Resurrection. This was the gift Pharaoh gave to his people. He had indeed promised his sorcerers generous gifts. Now everyone realizes what sort of gifts Pharaoh is able to give. What is more is the fact that the gift is always renewable, never ending. (11:99)

Moses Among the Offspring of Abraham

Chapter 6: The 55th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob.*
Each of them We guided.
And Noah We guided before
and among his offspring are David and Solomon and Job
and Joseph and Moses and Aaron.
And, thus, We gave recompense
to the ones who are doers of good. (6:84)

The Divine Revelation to Moses

Makkah: *And they measured not God with His true measure*
when they said: God caused not to descend anything to a mortal.
Say: Who caused the Book to descend
that was brought about for Moses
as a light and guidance for humanity?
You make it into parchments.
You show them some of it and conceal much of it.
And you were taught what you know not, you nor your fathers.
Say: God revealed it.
Again, forsake them playing, engaging in their idle talk. (6:91)

Commentary°

The ungrateful used to stubbornly argue that God had never sent a human Messenger, nor had he ever revealed anything to a human being. They maintained this in spite of the fact that there lived alongside them in the Arabian Peninsula a number of Jewish communities. The Arab idolaters did not deny that the Jews had a revealed book or that the Torah was sent down to Moses. Those Arabs made this argument in the midst of their stubborn refusal to accept the message given to the Prophet Muhammad. Hence, the Quran denounces their claims and reminds them of Moses' scriptures. (6:91)

Moses Given the Book

Makkah: *Again, We gave Moses the Book*
rendered complete for him who did good,
a decisive explanation of all things
and as a guidance and mercy,
so that perhaps they will believe
in the meeting with their Lord. (6:154)

Commentary°

This last passage of the chapter begins by speaking about the

book revealed to Moses, i.e. the Torah. This continues the discussion of God's straight way at the end of the last passage which concluded with the sign stating: Know that this is the way leading to Me, a straight path. Follow it, then, and do not follow other ways, for they cause you to deviate from His way. (6:153) This suggests that God's way stretches long in history, as was outlined in previous divine messages. The most recent code of law given in these messages prior to Islam was that of Moses. To him, God revealed a book in which He spelled out everything, providing guidance and bestowing grace, in the hope that his people would believe in the resurrection and the meeting with their Lord. (6:154)

God's Blessings on Moses and Aaron

Chapter 37: The 56th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly We showed Our grace*
to Moses and Aaron. (37:114)
And We delivered them and their folk
from the tremendous distress (37:115)
and helped them so that they, they
had been the ones who are victors. (37:116)
And We gave them the manifest Book (37:117)
and guided them to the straight path. (37:118)
We left for them a good name with the later ones: (37:119)
Peace be on Moses and Aaron! (37:120)
Truly, thus, We give recompense
to the ones who are doers of good. (37:121)
Truly, they were of Our servants, ones who believe. (37:122)

Commentary°

Here we only have a glimpse of the story of Moses and Aaron, highlighting God's favors bestowed on them first in being chosen to deliver His message, then in saving them and their people from great distress, which is recounted in detail in other chapters. God's favors on them also included their victory over their enemies, Pharaoh and his people, as also giving them the Scriptures and guiding them to the right path. It should be clear that God guides to this right path only those who believe in Him. He further ensured that they would be praised by future generations. This glimpse concludes with a greeting and blessing of peace from God to Moses and Aaron. Again the type of reward given to those who do good and the great value of faith, for which believers are held in honor, is repeated here.

The Disbelievers in Moses

Chapter 40: The 60th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We sent Moses with Our signs*
and a clear authority (40:23)
to Pharaoh and Haman and Korah.
But they said: He is one who is a lying sorcerer. (40:24)
Then, when he drew near with The Truth from Us,
they said: Kill the children of those who believed with him
and save alive their women. And the cunning of the
ones who are ungrateful is but going astray. (40:25)
And Pharaoh said: Let me kill Moses and let him call to his Lord.
Truly, I fear that he substitute for your way of life
or that he cause to appear in and on the earth corruption. (40:26)
And Moses said: Truly, I took refuge in my Lord
and your Lord from everyone who increases in pride
and who believes not in the Day of Reckoning. (40:27)
Said a believing man of the family of Pharaoh,
who keeps back his belief:
Would you kill a man because he says:
My Lord is God, and he drew near you
with the clear portents from your Lord?
And if he be one who lies, then, on him will be his lying.
And if he be one who is sincere,
then, will light on you some of what he promises. (40:28

Commentary°

The chapter does not dwell on what happened after this first encounter, omitting the match with the sorcerers when Moses' staff swallowed their trickery and forced them to declare their acceptance of triumphant truth. Instead, it goes on to the situation that prevailed after these initial events. (40:25) A comment on this attitude is given straight away, before the sign is even finished. (40:25)

Whenever tyranny is faced with a clear argument it cannot refute, it resorts to such tactics. It dreads that truth should prevail with its clear and strong arguments that appeal directly to sound human nature. Pharaoh witnessed how his sorcerers, whom he marshaled in the hope that they would defeat Moses, were the first to respond to the truth, immediately declaring themselves as believers. By contrast, Pharaoh, Haman and Korah said to slay the male children. (40:25)

The Believer in God Among Pharaoh's People

Makkah: *Truly, God guides not him*
who is one who is excessive, a liar. (40:28)

O my folk! Yours is the dominion this day,
ones who are prominent on the earth.
But who will help us from the might of God if it drew near us?
Pharaoh said: I cause you to see not but what I see
and what I guide you to is not but the way of rectitude. (40:29)
And he who believed said: O my folk!
Truly, I fear for you like a Day of the confederates (40:30)

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And Pharaoh said: O Haman!
Build for me a pavilion
so that perhaps I will reach the routes, (40:36)
the routes to the heavens,
and that I may peruse The God of Moses
but, truly, I think that he is one who lies.
Thus, it was made to appear pleasing to Pharaoh,
the evil of his actions. And he was barred from the way.
And the cunning of Pharaoh was not but in defeat. (40:37)

The Message of Moses

Makkah: *And he who believed said: O my folk! Follow me;*
I will guide you to the way of rectitude. (40:38)
O my folk! Truly, this present life is nothing
but transitory enjoyment and that the world to come
is the stopping place, the Abode. (40:39)
Whoever did an evil deed will not be given recompense
but the like of it. But whoever did as one in accord with morality,
whether male or female, and such is one who believes,
then, those will enter the Garden
where they will be provided in it without reckoning. (40:40)
And O my folk! What is it to me that I call to you
for deliverance and you call to me for the fire? (40:41)
You call to me to be ungrateful to God
and to ascribe partners with Him of what there is no knowledge,
while I call you to The Almighty, The Forgiver.(40:42)
Without a doubt what you call me to has no merit.
It is not a call to the present or to the world to come.
And our turning back is to God.
And, truly, the ones who are excessive,
they will be Companions of the Fire. (40:43)
And you will remember what I say to you.
I commit my affair to God.
Truly, God is Seeing of the servants. (40:44)

So God guarded him from the evil deeds that they planned while
surrounded the people of Pharaoh an evil punishment: (40:45)
The fire to which they are presented
the first part of the day and evening.
And on a Day when the Hour is secure it is said:
Cause the people of Pharaoh
to enter the severest punishment. (40:46)
And when they dispute with one another in the fire,
the weak will say to those who grew arrogant:
Truly, we had been followers of you so will you be
ones who avail us from a share of the fire? (40:47)
Those who grew arrogant would say: Truly, we are all in it.
Truly, God, surely, gave judgment among His servants. (40:48)
And those in the fire would say to ones who are keepers of hell:
Call to your Lord to lighten the punishment
or us for a day. (40:49)
They would say: Be bringing not your Messengers
the clear portents.
They would say: Yea! They would say: Then, you call.
And the supplication of the ones who are ungrateful
only goes astray. (40:50)

Commentary°

Faced with such devious manoeuvring, the believer makes his final say clear, free of ambiguity. He calls on his people to follow him in pursuing the right course leading to God. He emphasizes to them that this present life is worthless, while the life to come provides pure bliss. He warns them against the punishment of the hereafter, exposing the hollow and false nature of idolatrous beliefs: These are the same facts established at the beginning of the chapter. The believer restates them here as he confronts Pharaoh and his noblemen. (40:38) Only a few moments earlier, it was Pharaoh who said: I am guiding you to none other than the path of rectitude. (40:29) This means that the believer was making a clear challenge, stating the word of truth, fearing nothing that the tyrant Pharaoh, or his two ministers, Haman and Korah, could do to him. He tells them of the nature of this present life, whereas the life to come is the lasting home. (40:39) It is the one to be preferred

The chapter does not dwell on what happened between Moses, Pharaoh and the Children of Jacob after this, up to the point of Pharaoh's drowning while Moses and his people were saved. Instead, it affords some glimpses of what happened thereafter, indeed, after life itself.

God delivered him from the evils of their scheming, whereas grievous suffering was to encompass Pharaohs folk. (40:45-40:50)

This present world is over, and we see the first event that succeeds it. We see the believer who stated the truth being saved from Pharaoh and his aides' scheming. They could not cause him any harm in this world, nor after it. By contrast, Pharaoh's folk were engulfed by suffering: (40:46)

We are all weak, lacking all support and help. We are all alike. So why do you put such a question to us when you realize that the noble and the weaker elements are all the same? God has judged between His creatures. There can be no review or change to His judgment. The matter is settled. No creature can reduce or amend God's judgment.

When all realize that no refuge can be sought from God's punishment except with Him, they all humbly appeal to the guards of hell, in a way that makes them all equal. (40:49) They want the guards of hell to intercede on their behalf, hoping that their terrible ordeal can be lifted a little. They ask them to pray to God to reduce their punishment for one day, just to breathe and have a bit of rest. Even a day's reduction is worth such appeals.

The guards of hell, however, do not respond to this humble and passionate appeal. They know their limits, and they are aware of God's law and that the time is long passed. Therefore, they increase the suffering of the dwellers of hell by rebuking them and reminding them of the reasons for their suffering: (40:50)

The question and its answer suffice. There is no need for any more argument. The guards of hell leave them to their fate, allowing them to sink into despair. (40:50) If any praying will change your situation even a bit, why do you not offer such prayers yourselves? The sign concludes with a comment on such prayers. (40:50) Such prayer is ignored, remains unanswered. Those who say it are forgotten, be they the leaders or their followers.

Moses Given Guidance

Chapter 40: The 60th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We gave Moses the guidance*
and We gave as inheritance
to the Children of Jacob the Book (40:53)
as a guidance and a reminder
for those imbued with intuition. (40:54)

Commentary°

Moses' story shows yet another form of victory: "And indeed,

We bestowed Our guidance on Moses, and passed down the Book to the Children of Jacob as a guide and a reminder to people of understanding (40:53-40:54) Providing guidance and passing the book down to them was a form of victory that clearly reflects the breadth of its scope.

Moses Given the Book

Chapter 41: The 61st Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We gave Moses the Book.*
Then, they were at variance about it.
And if it were not for a Word that had preceded from your Lord,
it would have been decided between them.
But, truly, they are in uncertainty,
ones in grave doubt about it. (41:45)

Commentary°

A reference follows to Moses and his book, and how his people differed in their attitude to the Quran. God has deferred His judgment on their disputes. He has decreed that judgment on all this will be given on the Day of Judgment. (41:45)

Moses Sent To Pharaoh

Chapter 43: The 63rd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We sent Moses with Our signs*
to Pharaoh and his Council.
So he said: Truly, I am a Messenger
of the Lord of the worlds. (43:46)
But when he drew near them with Our signs,
that is when they laugh at them. (43:47)
And We cause them not to see any sign,
but it was greater than its sister's sign.
And We took them with the punishment
so that perhaps they would return. (43:48)
And they said: O one who is a sorcerer!
Call for us to your Lord by the compact He made with you.
Truly, We will be ones who are truly guided. (43:49)
But when We removed the punishment from them,
that is when they break their oath! (43:50)
And Pharaoh proclaimed to his folk. He said:
O my folk! Is not the dominion of Egypt for me
and these rivers run beneath me?
Will you not, then, perceive? (43:51)

Or am I better than this one who is despicable,
who scarcely makes things clear? (43:52)
Why were bracelets of gold not cast down on him
or the angels drawn near to him
as ones who are connected with one another? (43:53)
Thus, he irritated his folk. Then, they obeyed him.
Truly, they had been a folk, ones who disobey. (43:54)
So when they provoked against Us,
We requited them and drowned them one and all (43:55)
and We made them a thing of the past
and a parable for later ages. (43:56)

Commentary°

This message proclaims that humanity have attained maturity. This makes man responsible for his choices. Such responsibility is based on individual accountability. Therefore, each one is free to choose, knowing that "your Lord is never unjust to His creatures."

The chapter then recounts an episode from Moses' life history, one that reflects Pharaoh's similarly false values. This account demonstrates how both these values and Pharaoh himself were unworthy. It tells us of the fate that awaits him and all those with similar attitudes.

Throughout this episode, the unity of the divine message is clearly apparent. Similarly, the nature of the tyrannical elders and their reception of the message of the truth is the same. They all cling to the trivial values of this world. We also see the nature of the masses who are easily led astray by their leaders. (43:46-43:47)

The episode starts with a very brief reference to the first meeting between Moses and Pharaoh, as a prelude to the main point intended here, which is to portray the similarity of the objections made by Pharaoh and the pagan Arabs, as also their similar values. It sums up the nature of Moses' message. (Verse 46) It is the same truth stated by every Messenger: that he is a Messenger sent by the Lord of all the worlds. The signs then provides a very quick reference to the signs given to Moses, adding how the people received these. (43:47) The arrogant and the ignorant always behave this way.

This is followed by a reference to the testing hardships God inflicted on Pharaoh and his people, which are detailed in other chapters (43:48-43:50):

Pharaoh knew how to manipulate his peoples hearts and delude them with his riches: (43:52) What he meant by referring to 'this contemptible wretch1 was that Moses was not a king, a prince, or a man of power or wealth. Or perhaps he meant that Moses belonged to the

Children of Jacob, a wretched and enslaved community in Egypt. His other description of Moses as one 'who can hardly make his meaning clear refers to his speech impediment. Nothing now prevented him from making his meaning clear. In the eyes of the masses, Pharaoh, with his terrestrial kingdom, was better than Moses, even though he had the word of truth, was a Prophet, and advocated the faith that ensured safety from hell.

Is such a petty thing as a gold bracelet (43:53) needed to confirm a divine message? Is a mere trifling to be valued as greater than the miracles God gave to His Messenger? Or, perhaps, Pharaoh meant that Moses should have been crowned as king to give him power as well as the message. (43:53) This is yet another deceptive objection, one that is often leveled at God's Messengers

The time of tests, warnings and education was over. God was fully aware that these people would not believe. The masses willingly obeyed Pharaoh, an arrogant tyrant, turning a blind eye to God's light and His clear signs. Therefore, the warning had to be fulfilled and God's word was issued: (43:55-43:56)

Pharaoh and His Army Drowned

Chapter 44: The 64th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We tried a folk of Pharaoh*
before them when there drew near them
a generous Messenger: (44:17)
Give back to me the servants of God, the Children of Jacob.
Truly, I am a trustworthy Messenger to you. (44:18)
And rise not up against God.
Truly, I am one who arrives with a clear authority. (44:19)
Truly, I took refuge in my Lord
and your Lord so that you not stone me. (44:20)
But if you believe not in me, then, withdraw. (44:21)
So he called on his Lord: Truly, these are a folk,
ones who sin. (44:22)
He said: Set you forth with my
servants by night. Truly, you will be
ones who are followed. (44:23)
And leave the sea calmly as it is.
Truly, they will be an army, one that is drowned. (44:24)
How many they left behind of gardens and springs (44:25)
and crops and generous stations (44:26)
and prosperity in which they had been,
ones who are joyful! (44:27)
And, thus, We gave it as inheritance to another folk. (44:28)

And neither the heavens wept for them nor the earth nor had they been ones who are given respite. (44:29)

Commentary°

Moses received an endorsement from God with regard to his evaluation of his peoples' status: they were truly guilty. (44:23-24) That their flight was to occur at night comes in for stronger emphasis in the Arabic text: the verb *asri*, translated as set forth, implies that the march must be under cover of darkness, then the [sign] adds the word *laylan*, meaning by night. Thus they set forth stealthily, at night, unseen by Pharaoh and his watchmen. Furthermore, they were instructed not to make any disturbance in the parted sea as they crossed through it.

Thus, Pharaoh and his army would be tempted to pursue them and God's will would then be as He had determined. Their army is drowned? (44:24) Thus, God's will is done through apparent causes, but these causes are part and parcel of His will and how it is accomplished.

The chapter sums up the scene of this mass drowning in words that express God's will, which inevitably comes to pass. (44:24) This is followed with a comment highlighting Pharaoh's humiliation as also of those who supported his arrogant tyranny.

The scene begins with an image of the splendid comfort in which they dwelled: gardens, fountains, plants, high position, honor and blessings in which they revelled. Yet all this is taken away from them, or they are removed from it, so as to give it to others.

A very brief account of the history of Moses and Pharaoh is then added. It concludes with a mighty strike in this present life, corresponding to the mighty onslaught that will strike them on the day when the skies will bring forth their smoke. (44:17-44:29)

What happened next? Those same tyrants, who had gloried in their power and who were held in awe by people, were removed altogether. None grieved for them. Neither earth nor heaven felt their loss. Nor were they given any reprieve: Neither heaven nor earth shed tears over them, nor were they allowed a respite. (44:29) The statement carries connotations of humiliation and total disregard. No one on earth or in heaven was sorry about how these tyrants met their end. They were crushed like ants under foot. The whole universe hated them because they had split themselves away from it. This is a universe that believes in its Lord while they denied Him. Theirs were evil souls, untouchable by the universe in which they lived. Had these tyrants felt what these words imply, they would have foreseen

their own humiliation and known that the universe looks upon them as creatures apart.

Pharaoh Exalts Himself

Pharaoh. Truly, He had been one who exalts himself
and was of the ones who are excessive. (44:31)

Commentary°

We saved the Children of Jacob from humiliating suffering, from Pharaoh, who was arrogant and a transgressor. We chose them knowingly above all other people. And We gave them signs in which there was a clear test. (44:30-44:33)

It was from humiliating suffering that the Children of Jacob were saved. This contrasts with the humiliation that the Egyptian tyrants and transgressors found themselves in. They were saved from Pharaoh, who was arrogant and a transgressor. (44:31)

The Children of Jacob Delivered

Makkah: *And, certainly, We delivered the Children of Jacob*
from the despised punishment (44:30)
of Pharaoh. Truly He had been one who exalts himself
and was of the ones who are excessive (44:31)
And, certainly, We chose them with knowledge
above the worlds (44:32)
and gave them the signs
in which there was a clear trial. (44:33)

Commentary°

The chapter then mentions the fact that God chose the Children of Jacob, knowing all about them, with both their positive and negative qualities. Yet He chose them in preference to all other people in their own time. God knew that they were, at the time, the best people to be given the trust. Perhaps God made His choice on the basis that whilst they did not then attain the high standard of faith He required, they would nonetheless be the best under a faithful leadership that led them along the straight path of faith and insight.

The Children of Jacob Given the Book

Chapter 45: The 65th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We gave the Children of Jacob the Book*
the critical judgment and the prophethood
and We provided them from what is good
and We gave them advantage over the worlds (45:16)
and We gave them clear portents of the command.

And they are not at variance until after the knowledge
drew near them through insolence among themselves.
Truly, your Lord will decree between them
on the Day of Resurrection
about what they had been at variance in it. (45:17)

The Children of Jacob Bear Witness

Chapter 46: The 66th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Say: Considered you*
if this had been from God and you were ungrateful for it
and bore witness as one who bears witness
from among the Children of Jacob to its like
and believed in it, yet you grew arrogant,
how unjust you are; truly, God guides not the folk,
the ones who are unjust. (46:10)

Commentary°

This [sign 46:10] may refer to one or more of the Jews who, knowing the nature of the Torah, recognized that the Quran had the same nature as earlier revealed books and, therefore, declared themselves believers in Islam.

The chapter uses a special style in presenting its argument to them: Have you thought: what if this Quran is really from God and you reject it?... (46:10) It aims to shake their stubborn rejection and raise a fear within them concerning the eventual result. Since there is a possibility that the Quran may really be from God, as Muhammad (peace be upon him) says, should they not take precautions lest their rejection of it brings them to a terrible end? Could all the warnings it provides come true? Would they not be better advised to reflect on the whole matter lest they leave themselves open to all that it warns them against? Taking such precautions is all the wiser, considering that one or more of the people of divine faiths confirmed that the Quran is of the same nature as earlier revealed scriptures, and followed this by declaring their belief in it. By contrast, they, whose language the Quran speaks, persist with their rejection. This is indeed blatant wrongdoing as it suppresses the truth. It deserves Gods punishment: u God does not guide wrongdoers." (46:10)

The Book of Moses

Makkah: *Yet before it was the Book of Moses for a leader*
and as a mercy. . (46:12)

Pharoah and his Armies Cast Into the Sea

Chapter 51: The 67th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And in Moses, then,*
We sent him to Pharaoh with a clear authority. (51:38)
Then Pharaoh turned away to his court
He said: One who is a sorcerer, one who is possessed! (51:39)
So We took him and his armies
and cast them forth into the water of the sea
and he is one who is answerable. (51:40)

Commentary°

Another sign is cited from the history of Moses. A brief reference to this is made within the context of the signs from the history of God's Messengers. (51:38-40)

The clear authority God gave to Moses was his powerful argument and irrefutable proof, as well as that people were in awe of his presence. Yet Pharaoh turned away, proud of his power, and rejected the clear truth and the decisive proof. When Moses showed him the miraculous signs God had given him, Pharaoh said that Moses was 'a sorcerer or a madman. This confirms that miracles will not guide a heart that is not prepared to believe. They cannot silence a voice that insists on repeating fabrications.

The chapter does not give details of Moses story. It proceeds straight to its conclusion. (51:40) Pharaoh certainly deserved all blame because of his transgression and rejection of God s message. The phraseology here clearly indicates God's direct action in seizing Pharaoh and his army and casting them into the sea. This is deliberately highlighted as it fits with the exhibition of God s signs on earth, in man and throughout history.

Moses and His Journey to the Meeting of the Two Seas (1)

Chapter 18: The 69th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Mention when Moses*
said to his spiritual warrior:
I will not quit until I reach the place of meeting of the two seas
even if I will go on for many years. (18:60)
But when they reached the place of the meeting between them,
then, they both forgot their great fish
and it took to itself a way through the sea, burrowing. (18:61)
Then, when they crossed, he said to his spiritual warrior:
Give us our breakfast.

Certainly, we met fatigue from our journey. (18:62)
*He said: Had **you** considered?*
When we took shelter at the rock, truly, I forgot the great fish.
And none but Satan caused me to forget to remember it.
And it took to itself to a way into the sea
in a wondrous way. (18:63)
He said: That is what we had been looking for!
So they went back following their footsteps. (18:64)
Then, they found a servant among Our servants
to whom We gave mercy from Us and We taught him knowledge
which proceeds from Our Presence. (18:65)
*Moses said to him: May I follow **you***
*so that **you** will teach me something of what*
***you** were taught of right judgment?* (18:66)
*He said: Truly, **you** will never be able*
to have patience with me. (18:67)
*And how will **you** endure a thing patiently*
*when **you** have not comprehended any awareness of it?* (18:68)
*Moses said: **You** will find me, if God willed,*
one who remains steadfast
*and I will not rebel against **your** command.* (18:69)
*He said: Then, if **you** had followed me,*
ask me not about anything
*until I cause to be evoked in **you***
a remembrance of it. (18:70)

Commentary°

This part of the chapter begins by relating an episode in the life of the Prophet Moses which is not told or hinted at anywhere else in the Quran. The chapter does not give details of where this episode took place other than saying, 'the place where the two seas meet.' Nor does it define the period in Moses lifetime when the events took place. Thus, we do not know whether the events related took place when Moses was still in Egypt, before he led the Children of Jacob on their way to Palestine, or after they had left it. If the latter, was it before he led them into the Holy Land, or when they stopped, refusing to enter because they did not wish to confront its powerful inhabitants? Was it after they had begun their forty years of wandering in the land, going to and fro, in total loss?

The event involves a goodly servant of God's whom Moses meets and accompanies for a period of time. But the chapter does not give us any details of the identity of this person. It does not mention his name or status. Was he a Prophet, a Messenger, a scholar, or

a person favor ed by God for his strong faith and complete dedication to the service of His cause?

Moses said to his spiritual warrior that he shall journey (18:60) Most probably, and God knows best, the place described here as the 'point where the two seas meet' refers to the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, and their meeting place is the area where the Bitter lakes and the Timsah lake are found along the Suez Canal. It may also be a reference to the meeting point of the Gulf of Suez and the Gulf of Aqabah at the northern end of the Red Sea. This whole area witnessed the history of the Children of Jacob after they left Egypt. Anyway, the Quran only refers to it in passing without defining it further. There are several other reports suggesting where the area was that the two seas meet, but we feel these are all unacceptable.

But when they reached the junction between the two seas, they forgot their fish, and it took its way into the sea and disappeared from sight. And after they had marched on for some distance. (18:61-63)

Most probably, the fish was cooked. Its raising back to life and its moving straight into the sea was a sign given by God to Moses, so that he would know the place where he was to meet the man. This is indicated by the amazement expressed by the servant when he saw the fish swimming in the sea. Had the fish only dropped into the sea and settled at the bottom, there would be nothing strange in the matter. What makes this interpretation more plausible is that the whole trip was full of surprises that go beyond imagination, and this was only one of them.

Moses realized that he had gone beyond the place where he was to meet the man, which was by the rock where he and his servant had stayed for a little rest. Hence he traced his way back to it and there they met the man they sought: (18:64-18:65)

It also seems that this meeting was to remain Moses' secret, given to him by his Lord. His servant did not know anything about it until they met the man. Therefore, the following scenes in the story speak only about Moses and the pious man endowed with knowledge.

First Jolting Shock: Moses addresses the pious sage in a most polite manner. It is the sort of politeness that is worthy of a Prophet. He puts his request, without making any assumptions, and he makes it clear that he seeks proper knowledge from a good servant of God:

The man's knowledge however is nothing like human knowledge with its immediate causes and inevitable results. It is a part of divine knowledge that God has granted him, according to a measure He determined and for a purpose He wanted to accomplish. Moses could not be expected to be patient with the man and his actions,

even though Moses was a Prophet and a Messenger from God. Looked at superficially, these actions may appear to have no logical justification whatsoever. They could not be understood without having access to the wisdom dictating them, and that is part of divine wisdom that people cannot begin to comprehend.

The sage understandably fears that Moses may not have the patience required to make of him a comfortable companion. (18:67-18:68) But Moses is so eager to learn. Hence he resolves to be very patient and obedient, seeks God's help and places God's will ahead of his own resolve. (18:69)

The man reiterates the difficulties ahead, stating to Moses a condition for his companionship: that he remain patient and not question the sage about any action he takes until he himself reveals its purpose. (18:70)

Moses and His Journey to the Meeting of the Two Seas (2)

Makkah: *So they both set out until*
when they embarked in a vessel.
He made a hole in it.
*Moses said: Had **you** made a hole in it*
in order to drown the people?
*Certainly, **you** had brought about a dreadful thing!* (18:71)
*He said: Said I not that **you** will never be able*
to have patience with me? (18:72)
Moses said: Take me not to task for what I forgot
and constrain me not with hardship for my affair. (18:73)
Then, they both set out until when they met a boy;
*then, he killed him. Moses said: Had **you** killed a pure soul*
without his having slain a soul?
*Certainly, **you** had brought about a horrible thing!* (18:74)
*He said: Said I not that **you** wilt never be able*
to have patience with me? (18:75)
*Moses said: If I asked **you** about anything after this,*
then, keep not company with me,
*surely, **you** had reached enough of excusing*
from my presence! (18:76)
Then, they both set out
until when they approached a people of a town.
They asked its people for food.
But they refused to receive them as guests.
Then, they found in it a wall

that wants to tumble down, so he repaired it.
*Moses said: If **you** had willed,*
*certainly, **you** woulds have taken compensation*
*to **yourself** for it.* (18:77)
*He said: This is the parting between me and between **you**!*
*I will tell **you** the interpretation*
*of what **you** were not able to have patience for it.* (18:78)
As for the vessel, it had been of some needy people
who toil in the sea,
so I wanted to mar it as there had been a king behind them
taking every vessel forcefully. (18:79)
And as for the boy, both his parents had been ones who believe,
and we dreaded that he should constrain them
with defiance and ingratitude, (18:80)
so we wanted their Lord to cause for them
in exchange one better than he
in purity and nearer in sympathy. (18:81)
As for the wall, it had been that of two orphan boys in the city
and beneath it had been a treasure for them.
The father of both of them had been one in accord with morality
*so **your** Lord wanted they be fully grown, having come of age,*
*and pull out their treasure as a mercy from **your** Lord.*
And I accomplished that not of my own command.
*This is the interpretation of what **you** were*
not able to have patience for it. (18:82)

Commentary°

Soon afterwards comes the first scene from the trip. (18:71) This is certainly a strange thing to do. The boat carried both men as well as other passengers. They are all in the middle of the sea, and the sage makes a hole in the boat. On the surface, this is an action that exposes the boat and all its passengers to the risk of being drowned. Why would anyone, let alone a learned and devout person, do such an evil thing?

Confronted with such an apparently outrageous action, Moses simply forgets the conversation that he had had with the sage. A human being may accept something when it is discussed in abstract terms, but when he faces it in practice and looks at its consequences, his reaction may be totally different. Practical matters have a totally different effect. Here we see Moses, having already been warned against apparently outrageous actions and having resolved to remain patient, loses all patience when faced with a tough situation.

With such an impulsive nature, Moses could not be patient when

he saw his companion making a hole in the boat. He forgot all about his promise. Human nature is shown not to comprehend matters fully except through practical experience. Hence Moses says in objection. (18:71)

But the sage tolerates this with patience, and he gently reminds Moses of what he said earlier. (18:72) Moses now regrets his overreaction, saying that he completely forgot. He requests the man to accept his apologies and not to rebuke him. (18:73) The man accepts his apologies and the two proceed further.

There are, however, other strange events awaiting Moses which would exhaust his patience. (18:74)

The first action exposed the boat and its passengers to certain risks. Now there is the blatant murder of a young man without provocation or justification. This was too much for Moses to tolerate patiently, despite all the promises he had given not to question anything he saw. (18:74)

This suggests that Moses was not unmindful of his promise. He probably remembered it, but felt unable to keep quiet when he witnessed a murder. To him, the young man was innocent. He had not perpetrated anything to justify his killing. He was perhaps even under age, so that he could not be held accountable for any misdeeds.

Once again the sage reminds Moses of the condition he has made and the promises Moses has given, referring also to what he said in the first place. (18:75) This time, however, the sage goes further and reminds Moses that he said all this to him personally. So the early warning was addressed to Moses personally, but he was not convinced. He had sought to be the man's companion accepting his conditions.

Again Moses reflects, knowing that he has broken his promises twice, forgetting it despite reminders. His regret makes him too apologetic, depriving himself of any possibility of a lengthy companionship with the sage. He gives himself only one last chance:. (18:76)

This brings us to the third and last scene: And so the two went on until they came to a town, where they asked its people for food, but they refused them all hospitality. There they found a wall on the point of falling down, and [the sage] rebuilt it. (18:77)

The two are hungry but find themselves in a town whose population are extremely inhospitable. They receive no guests and give nothing to the poor and hungry. Yet the man finds a wall there about to fall down. The Arabic text is more vivid, making the wall almost like a living creature with a will that makes it want to fall. Yet this stranger occupies himself with rebuilding the wall for nothing.

Moses finds the situation full of irony. Why should such a stranger exert so much effort in rebuilding a wall in a town where they were denied even a little food and all hospitality? He should have at least demanded some money for his labors and then they could have bought some food to eat. He says: Had you wished, you could have taken payment for what you did. (18:77)

This signaled the end of this unlikely companionship. Moses no longer had any excuse to offer. (18:78)

Up to this point Moses, as well as everyone following the story, have been subjected to a series of surprises with no indication as to their meaning or purpose. Our response is the same as that of Moses. We do not even know who the person was who did such singular acts. The Quran does not tell us his name, in order to add to the general air of bafflement surrounding us.

But what would his name add? The sage simply represents higher divine wisdom that does not attach results to their immediate causes. It aims to explain that there are objectives of which we may know nothing about. Hence, keeping his name from us fits in well with the abstract concept he represents.

Furthermore, higher forces dictate the development of the story right from the beginning. Moses is so keen to meet this man, he travels until he is totally worn out. But his servant leaves their food at the rock where they stopped to rest. But his forgetfulness is the cause of their return only to find the man at that very spot. Had they travelled on, they would have missed him. The whole atmosphere is shrouded in secrecy, just like the man's name.

The secret is then revealed: As for the boat, it belonged to some needy people who toiled upon the sea—and I desired to slightly damage it because behind them there was a king who was taking every boat by force. (18:79) This explains that the small damage the boat suffered was enough to save it for its people. Had it been seaworthy, it would certainly have been confiscated by the tyrannical king. Perpetrating some small damage to the boat saved it from the greater harm and ruinous injustice that was certain to take place without it. Hence, causing such damage was a good and kindly action.

And as for the young man, his parents are true believers, and we feared lest he should cause them much grief by his overweening wickedness and unbelief. And so we desired that their Lord grant them in his stead [a son] of greater purity than him, and closer in loving tenderness. (18:80-18:81)

This young man appeared at the time to be deserving of no punishment, but God revealed his true nature to the sage. We realize now that he harbored all the seeds of wickedness and unbelief that were

bound to increase as he grew up. Had he lived, he would have caused his parents, believers as they were, too much trouble. He might have led them, out of love for him, to follow him in his wickedness. Hence, God directed His goodly servant to kill the boy in order to replace him with one who would be better and more dutiful.

Had the matter been left to human knowledge, the sage could not have treated the boy except on the basis of what appeared to him. He would have had no justification in killing him, particularly since the boy appeared to be still under age, having done nothing to deserve capital punishment. It is not up to anyone, other than God Himself or one to whom God imparts knowledge from Him personally, to judge anyone on the basis of his nature. Nor is it permissible to make such knowledge the basis of any action other than that which appearances allow. But God may command what He wills, as He does in this case.

And as for the wall, it belonged to two orphan boys living in the town, and beneath it was buried a treasure belonging to them. Their father had been a righteous man. So your Lord has willed it that when they come of age they should dig up their treasure by your Lord's grace. (18:82)

This wall that the sage labored to rebuild, asking no wages for his labours despite the refusal of hospitality from the townspeople, had a treasure underneath. This treasure belonged to two young orphans in the town. Had the wall been left to fall down, the treasure would have become visible and the two boys would not have been able to claim it, considering their weakness. Since their father was a pious and righteous man, God allowed his children to benefit by his piety while they were weak. He willed to give them the time necessary to grow up and dig up their treasure when they were in a position to keep it.

The sage then disowns any share in this whole matter. It is God's grace that dictated all his actions. It was all by God's command who had imparted to him the necessary knowledge in such cases and others, showing him what to do in each case: I did not do any of this of my own accord. (18:82)

Thus the secret is made clear, and all the actions of the sage that seemed preposterous in the first instance appear to be simple and wise. Now that the curtain has been removed and the secret revealed, the man disappears totally from the scene and no further mention is made of him in this chapter nor indeed throughout the rest of the Quran. The story itself represents God's great wisdom, which reveals itself only when and as needed.

Within the context of the whole chapter , this story about Moses and the sage is closely linked to the story of the young sleepers in

the cave. Both agree that what lies beyond our human perception should be left totally to God, who will conduct it on the basis of His perfect and absolute knowledge. As for us, we know only what is told to us.

The Message of Moses

Chapter 14: The 72nd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We sent Moses*
with Our signs saying:
*Bring out **your** folk from the shadows into the light*
and remind them of the Days of God.
Truly, in that are signs for every enduring, grateful one. (14:5)
And mention when Moses said to his folk:
Remember the divine blessing of God to you
when He rescued you from the people of Pharaoh
who cause an affliction to befall you—a dire punishment—
and slaughter your children and save alive your women.
And in it was a serious trial from your Lord. (14:6)
And mention when your Lord caused to be proclaimed:
If you gave thanks, I will increase your blessings.
And if you were ungrateful, truly,
My punishment will be severe. (14:7)
And Moses said: Even if you are ungrateful, you
and what is in and on the earth altogether,
then, truly, God is Sufficient, Worthy of Praise. (14:8)

Commentary°

Moses began to fulfill his task and remind his people. (14:6) He reminds them first of God's grace when he delivered them from the great torment inflicted on them by Pharaoh's people. That torment was visited on them time after time, with little reprieve. One of the ghastlier features of that torment was the killing of the male as a means of preventing them from increasing in number. This aimed to ensure their continued weakness and subjugation. The fact that God saved them from all this was a great act demonstrating His grace. It should be remembered with gratitude

Moses continues to explain matters to his people after having reminded them of the Days of God, and directed them to the ultimate objective of the trial. He tells them about the reward God attaches to gratitude and His punishment for ingratitude: (14:7)

It is useful to reflect a little here on this great truth whereby God's blessings are increased for the grateful and whereby severe punishment awaits those who adopt the opposite stance. In the first instance, we feel reassured, since it is a promise by God, and God

always fulfills His promises. It must come to pass. If we want to see it in practice, and look for its material causes, we need not go very far.

The Criterion Given to Moses and Aaron as a Reminder for the God-conscious.

Chapter 21: The 73rd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We gave Moses and Aaron the Criterion between right and wrong and an illumination and a Remembrance for the ones who are God-conscious.* (21:48)

Commentary°

In this third passage the chapter speaks about the communities that followed God's Messengers, but it is not exhaustive in this respect. Some are not mentioned at all. Some are given only a brief mention, while others are referred to in some detail. We see in these references how God takes care of His Messengers and bestows His grace on them. We also see the fate of those who continued to accuse their Messengers of being liars, even though clear proof was given to them. We are further given an idea of how God tests His Messengers, at times with delightful pleasures and at others with much affliction, and how they pass these tests.

The wisdom behind sending human Messengers is also clear in this passage. The oneness of the faith and the way to be followed by all Messengers, at all times, is also clearly apparent. We feel that they belong to a single community, despite the fact that they lived at different times and in different places. All this testifies to the oneness of the Maker, the will behind all events, and the consistency of the overall law that governs and unites the universe. It directs us all to one end: namely, to serve the One God worthy of worship. (21:92)

The Torah is also described as a guiding light that dispels all the darkness that may engulf the human mind, leading to errant beliefs. It also dispels the darkness that leads people astray and the darkness of falsehood. In such types of darkness both reason and conscience may find themselves at a loss. Indeed, the human heart remains in darkness until the light of faith is kindled within it. Faith thus sets it aglow, clearly setting its approach, guiding it to the path that should be followed, so that confusion does not arise from divergent values and concepts.

Moses and Aaron Sent to Pharaoh

Chapter 23: The 74th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Again, We sent Moses and his brother Aaron*

with Our signs and clear authority (23:45)
to Pharaoh and his Council.
Then, they grew arrogant and they had been a folk,
ones who exalt themselves. (23:46)
Then, they said: Will we believe in two mortals like ourselves
while their folk are ones who worship us? (23:47)
So they denied both of them.
They had been among the ones who are caused to perish. (23:48)
And, certainly, We gave Moses the Book
so that perhaps they will be truly guided. (23:49)

Commentary°

Again in this account we note that the same objection is given to the fact that the Messenger was merely a human being. (23:47) A specific consideration connected with the Children of Jacob's situation in Egypt is also added. (23:47) They are subservient to us and they do our bidding. In this situation, Moses and Aaron deserve, in Pharaoh's and his people's view, to be looked down upon. As for the revelations and the signs they have been given by God, and the clear authority granted to them, these count for nothing according to these people, focused as they are on earthly considerations and false values.

The Book of Moses a Guidance for the Children of Jacob

Chapter 32: The 75th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We gave Moses the Book.*
So be you not hesitant about meeting Him.
And We assigned it as a guidance
for the Children of Jacob. (32:23)

Pharaoh Rebelled Against the Lord of Moses

Chapter 69: The 78th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Pharaoh and whoever draw near before him*
and the ones that are cities overthrown
were ones of inequity (69:9)
and they rebelled against the Messenger of their Lord,
so He took them with a swelling, taking. (69:10)
When the waters became turbulent,
we carried you in that which runs on water, (69:11)
that We make it an admonition for you,
nd attentive ears would hold onto it. (69:12)

There is a Lesson in the Fate of Pharaoh

Chapter 79: The 81st Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Approached **you** the discourse of Moses* (79:15)
when his Lord cried out to him
in the sanctified valley of Tuwa: (79:16)
*Be **you** gone to Pharaoh. Truly, he was defiant.* (79:17)
*And say: Would **you** purify **yourself**?* (79:18)
*And I will guide **you** to **your** Lord,*
*then, **you** will dread Him.* (79:19)
And he caused him to see the greater sign. (79:20)
But Pharaoh denied and rebelled. (79:21)
Again, Pharaoh drew back, hastening about. (79:22)
Then, Pharaoh assembled them; then, proclaimed. (79:23)
Then, Pharaoh said: I am your lofty lord. (79:24)
So God took him with an exemplary punishment
for the last and for the first. (79:25)
Truly, in that is a lesson for whoever dreads God. (79:26)

Commentary°

The rhythm then slows down a little in order to suit the style of narration. For next we have an account of what took place between Moses and Pharaoh, and the end which Pharaoh met after he had tyrannized and transgressed all bounds.

He showed Pharaoh the mightiest miracle, but Pharaoh cried lies and rebelled. He then turned away hastily. He summoned all his men and made a proclamation to them: I am your supreme Lord, he said. God smote him with the scourge of both the life to come and this life. Surely in this there is a lesson for the God-fearing. (79:15-26)

God teaches Moses how to address this tyrant in the most persuasive manner. (79:18) The first question then is whether or not the tyrant would like to purify himself of the stains of tyranny and abominable disobedience to God. Would he like to know the path of the pious, the blessed? (79:19) The offer here is for Pharaoh to be shown the way acceptable to God. Once he knows it, he will feel the fear of God in his heart. The human being does not transgress and tyrannize unless he loses his way and finds himself taking a road which does not lead to God. His heart hardens as a result, and he rebels and resorts to tyranny.

Moses was told all this when God called to him. He of course puts these questions to Pharaoh when he encounters him. The chapter , however, does not repeat them when it describes the encounter. It skips over what happens after God's call to Moses and deletes what Moses says when he conveys his message. It is as if the curtain falls

after the call to repentance. When it is lifted again, we are presented with the end of the encounter. (79:20-79:21)

Thus, Moses conveys the message with which he has been entrusted in the manner God has taught him. This warm, friendly attitude, however, cannot win over a heart that has been hardened by tyranny and ignorance of the Lord of the universe. So Moses shows him the great miracles of the stick turning into a snake and Moses's own hand becoming a brilliant white, as they are described in other chapters: but he cried lies and rebelled. (79:21) The scene ends with Pharaoh's rejection and rebellion against God.

Pharaoh then turns away to mobilize his forces and bring forward his sorcerers for an encounter between magic and the truth. Essentially, Pharaoh was determined not to accept the truth or submit to right. (79:22-79:24) The chapter does not give any details of Pharaoh's efforts to muster his magicians, sorcerers and men. It simply says that he went away to do so, and then uttered his impertinent proclamation. (79:24)

The Mission of Moses

Chapter 29: The 85th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And Korah and Pharaoh and Haman and, certainly, Moses drew near to them with the clear portents, but they grew arrogant on the earth and they had not been ones who take the lead from Us.* (29:39)

Commentary°

Another very brief reference is made to earlier ungrateful. (29:39) Korah as we learned in the previous chapter was one of Moses' people. He behaved wrongfully towards them, using his wealth and knowledge in oppressive ways. He did not listen to the advice of honest and sincere people who counseled him to follow the path of moderation, humility and justice. Pharaoh was a terrible despot who committed ghastly and horrible crimes, enslaving people and sowing discord between them. In brutal defiance of all justice, he killed the male offspring of the Children of Jacob but spared their females. Haman was his minister who managed his schemes, assisting him in his tyrannical rule. (29:39) Their wealth, power and cunning could not protect them from God's punishment. They could not escape it. It engulfed them all. (29:39) Those who possessed power, wealth, the means to overpower others as well as the means to ensure their own survival have all gone. God destroyed them all after they had long oppressed and persecuted others.

The Children of Jacob Reminded of the Blessings They Received

Chapter 2: The 87th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *O Children of Jacob!*
Remember My divine blessing
with which I was gracious to you
and live up to the compact with Me.
I will live up to the compact with you.
And have reverence for Me alone. (2:40)
And believe in what I caused to descend,
that which establishes as true what is with you.
And be not the first one who is ungrateful for it.
And exchange not My signs for a little price.
And fear Me, God, alone. (2:41)
And confuse not The Truth with falsehood
nor keep back The Truth while you know. (2:42)
And perform the formal prayer,
and give the purifying alms,
and bow down with the ones who bow down. (2:43)
You command humanity to virtuous conduct
and forget yourselves while you relate the Book?
Will you not, then, be reasonable? (2:44)
And pray for help with patience and formal prayer.
And, truly, it is arduous, but for the ones who are humble, (2:45)
those who bear in mind that,
truly, they, they will be ones who encounter their Lord
and that to Him they will be ones who return. (2:46)

Children of Jacob Warned

Madinah: *And mention when We delivered you*
from the people of Pharaoh who cause an affliction
to befall you of a dire punishment.
They slaughter your children and save alive your women.
And in that there is a tremendous trial from your Lord. (2:49)
And mention when We separated the sea for you,
and We rescued you, and We drowned
the people of Pharaoh while you look on. (2:50)
And mention when We appointed for Moses forty nights.
Again, you took the calf to yourselves after him
and you were ones who are unjust. (2:51)
Again, We pardoned you after that,
so that perhaps you will give thanks. (2:52)
And mention when We gave Moses the Book,

and the Criterion between right and wrong,
so that perhaps you will be truly guided. (2:53)
And mention when Moses said to his folk:
O my folk! Truly, you did wrong to yourselves
by your taking the calf to yourselves to worship,
so repent to One Who is your Fashioner and kill yourselves.
That would be better for you with One Who is your Fashioner.
Then He will turn to you in forgiveness.
Truly, He, He is The Accepter of Repentance,
The Compassionate. (2:54)
And mention when you said: O Moses!
We will never believe you until we see God publicly.
So the thunderbolt took you while you look on. (2:55)
Again, We will raise you up after your death
so that perhaps you will give thanks. (2:56)
And We shaded over you cloud shadows.
We caused to descend to you the manna and the quails.
Eat of what is good that We provided you.
And they did not wrong Us.
Rather, they had been doing wrong to themselves. (2:57)
And mention when We said: Enter this town,
then, eat freely from it whatever you willed,
and enter the door as one who prostrates oneself and say:
Unburden us of sin! We will forgive you your transgressions.
And We will increase the ones who are doers of good. (2:58)
Then, those who did wrong substituted another sayin
—other than what was said to them—
so We caused to descend on those who did wron
wrath from heaven,
because they had been disobeying. (2:59)

Commentary°

The chapter proceeds to enumerate the favors God had extended to the Children of Jacob, the most significant of which was their deliverance from the tyranny and persecution of the Pharaoh. It portrays their response to these favors that was marked with lack of appreciation and flagrant violation of God's commandments. (Verses 49-50)

The Quran graphically recalls the ordeals suffered by the Children of Jacob's forefathers, as if the later Jews themselves had undergone those experiences. It stresses the act of deliverance as well as the torment and the persecution that preceded it. It makes the specific point that the whole experience contained an element of trial by God to the Children of Jacob, testing their faith and resolve, and their

trust in the Lord. The expression used in this sign in reference to the suffering adds connotations that the suffering was like food given regularly. It highlights one aspect of that suffering, which is the killing of young men. This was meant to weaken the Jews and exhaust their strength.

Having recalled the painful part of the episode, the chapter portrays the scene of delivery when God parted the sea for you, led you to safety and drowned Pharaoh's people before your very eyes. (Verse 50)

Nevertheless, God pardoned them and gave their Prophet, Moses, the Torah as a source of guidance for them. However, there was need for a thorough cleansing of ranks. Such a shaky nature could only be steadied by a very stringent atonement. (Verse 54) Thus, the order was given to kill those who went far astray as a means of cleansing for the whole community

While on Mount Sinai, the Children of Jacob had the audacity to demand from Moses that they should see God in person, to which God responded by striking them with a thunderbolt that left them as dead. Nevertheless, God was again merciful towards them and restored them to consciousness, so that they might appreciate His kindness and show gratitude.

God also recalls for them how He had taken care of their forefathers when they were lost in the wilderness, providing them with food and protecting them against the scorching heat of the sun. Historic records indicate that the Children of Jacob, on leaving Egypt, crossed the Red Sea into the Sinai desert. It was hot and without water, which put them in danger of dying of starvation. But, God bestowed His grace on them and provided them with a special type of food, as sweet as honey, which they called manna. God also sent them flocks of quail that they could easily catch and eat. Clouds would gather above them to protect them from the heat of the desert sun. Thus God alleviated their suffering in the wilderness, but, as the sign comments, they showed no appreciation or gratitude. As such, they were the losers. (2:57)

The chapter reminds the Children of Jacob of more of their acts of intransigence. (2:58-2:59)

The Children of Jacob descended from twelve tribes who went back to the twelve sons of Jacob, or Jacob, father of the Jews. When they needed water in the desert, they asked Moses to provide it for them, and he turned to God for help. God answered his prayers, and asked Moses to strike a rock with his stick, whereupon twelve springs, one for each tribe, spurted out with enough water for all their needs. They were given all this by God's grace, but they were also warned against spreading corruption. (2:60)

Moses' Prayer and the Providential Supply of Water

Madinah: *And mention when Moses*
asked for water for his folk.
Then, We said: Strike the rock with your staff.
Then, twelve springs ran out from it.
Every clan knew their drinking place.
Eat and drink from the provision of God,
and do no mischief in and on the earth
as ones who make corruption. (2:60)
And mention when you said: O Moses!
We will never endure patiently with one kind of food,
so call to your Lord for us to drive out for us
of what the earth is bringing forth of its green herbs
and its cucumbers and its garlic and its lentils and its onions.
Moses said: Would you have in exchange
what is lesser for what is higher?
Get down to a settled country.
Then, truly for you is what you asked for.
And stamped on them were abasement and wretchedness.
And they drew the burden of anger from God.
That was because they had been ungrateful for the signs of God,
and kill the Prophets without right. (2:61)

The Children of Jacob Reminded of Their Blessings

Madinah: *Truly those who have believed*
and those who have become Jews
and the Christians and the Sabeans,
whoever has believed in God and the Last Day
and is one who acted in accord with morality,
then for them, their compensation is with their Lord.
And there will be neither fear in them
nor will they feel remorse. (2:62)
And when We took your solemn promise
and We exalted the mount above you:
Take what We have given you with firmness
and remember what is in it,
so that perhaps you would be God-conscious. (2:63)
Moreover after that you turned away.
And had it not been for the grace of God on you
and His mercy certainly you would have been

among the ones who are losers. (2:64)
And certainly you knew those who committed aggression
among you against the Sabbath to whom We said:
Be you loathed apes. (2:65)
Then We made this an exemplary punishment
for the former of them and for those of succeeding generations
and an admonishment for the ones who are God-conscious (2:66)
And mention when Moses said to his folk:
Truly God commands that you sacrifice a cow.
They said: Have you taken us to yourself in mockery?
He said: I take refuge with God
that I be among the ones who are ignorant. (2:67)
They said: Call to **your** *Lord for us*
to make manifest to us what she is!
Moses said: Truly He says:
She should be a cow that is neither old nor a virgin;
middle-aged between that.
So accomplish what you are commanded. (2:68)
They said: Call to your Lord for us to make manifest to us
what is hue is. He said: Truly He says:
She is a saffron-colored cow,
one that is bright in hue that makes
the ones who look on her happy. (2:69)
They said: Call to **your** *Lord for us to make manifest to us*
what she is. Truly cows are alike to us
and truly had God willed
we will be ones who are truly guided. (2:70)
He said: Truly He says she is a cow
neither broken to plow the earth
nor to draw water for cultivation,
that which is to be handed over without blemish on her.
They said: Now **you** *have brought about The Truth.*
So they sacrificed her
and they almost accomplish it not. (2:71)

The Hard-heartedness of the Children of Jacob

Madinah: *And mention when you killed a soul,*
then, you put up an argument over it.
And God was One Who Drives Out
what you had been keeping back. (2:72)
So We said: Turn him away with some of it!
Thus, God gives life to the dead,

and He causes you to see His signs,
so that perhaps you will be reasonable. (2:73)
Again, after that, your hearts became hard,
so that they were as rocks or harder in hardness.
And, truly, from the rocks
there are some that the rivers gush forth from it.
And, truly, there are some that split open
to water goes forth from it.
And, truly, some that from it get down from dreading God.
And God is not One Who is
Heedless of what you do. (2:74)

Commentary°

God's directive, as conveyed to them by Moses was clear and simple: "sacrifice a cow." It hardly needed elaboration, nor was it difficult to carry out. Moses, after all, was the man who had led them out of Egypt and, by the grace of God, brought them to safety. He made it clear that he was simply conveying a commandment from God. Not only was their response insolent and brazen, but they also accused Moses of jesting and making fun of them.

Moses was clearly perturbed and made it immediately clear that he entertained no such idea. (2:67) His gentle, polite response was sufficient to prompt them to reconsider and act upon God's order. He makes it clear to them that mocking at others is unbecoming of anyone other than a person who does not know recognize God's position.

Up to that point, it was still possible for them to sacrifice any cow to fulfill God's order as given to them by His Messenger. (2:68)

That should have been more than adequate for them to choose a cow and carry out the order, discharging their obligation and sparing themselves further complication by narrowing their choices even further. Nevertheless, they insisted on asking more questions. (2:69) Since they asked, they received an answer. (2:69)

They continued to make matters difficult for themselves. Once again they ask about the type of cow they should sacrifice, justifying their new request on grounds that they had a problem of choice. (2:70)

There was now no escaping severe complication and restriction of choice, as more and more features were specified. (2:71)

It was no longer an ordinary, average cow that could be easily found anywhere, but one with a specific description and an unusual combination of features. Then, just as the matter became unduly complicated and the choice really hard, the people relented. (2:71)

It was as though Moses had not, up to that point, been telling them the truth, or they had not been disposed to believe him.

As soon as they carried out the command, God revealed to them its purpose. (2:72-2:73)

The final scene in the story should have been awesome enough to inspire faith, submission and fear of God in the hearts of the Children of Jacob. But despite all the lessons they might have learnt from earlier encounters related in the chapter, there is a gloomy, disappointing conclusion that comes as a complete surprise. (2:74)

The Solemn Promise of the Children of Jacob

Madinah: *And mention when We took a solemn promise*
from the Children of Jacob not to worship other than God,
and goodness to the ones who are your parents
and to the possessors of kinship and the orphans and the needy.
And speak with kindness to humanity.
And perform the formal prayer, and give the purifying alms.
Again, you turned away but a few among you.
You are ones who turn aside. (2:83)
And mention when We took your solemn promise:
You will not shed your blood,
nor drive yourselves out from your abodes.
Again, you were in
accord and you, you bear witness. (2:84)
Again, you are these—killing yourselves,
and driving out a group of people among you from their abodes,
to support one another against them in sin and deep seated dislike.
And if they approach you as prisoners of war, you redeem them,
although expelling them is that which is forbidden to you.
Then, believe you in some of the Book,
and are ungrateful for some?
Then, what will be the recompense
of whoever commits that among you,
but degradation in this present life?
And on the Day of Resurrection,
they will be returned to the hardest punishment.
And God is not One Who is Heedless of what you do. (2:85)

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Commentary°

Reference has already been made to God's covenant with the Children of Jacob, and here we learn of more details of this covenant.

Right at the outset, we learn that the covenant between God and the Children of Jacob contained the fundamental and absolute tenets

of Divine faith that were subsequently confirmed by Islam, which the Jews chose to oppose and deny.

It required that the Children of Jacob submit to, and worship God, other than whom there is no deity. It advocated kindness to parents, relatives, orphans and the poor in society. It urged courtesy towards others, especially in teaching and preaching to them about right and wrong, good and evil. Furthermore, the covenant enjoined upon the Children of Jacob the observance of regular prayer and the giving of alms; all of which are, indeed, the very basic principles and obligations set by Islam.

This leads to a definite conclusion. God's religion is one and the same throughout human history; its last version, Islam, confirms and endorses the fundamentals of all preceding ones.

The chapter then turns to address the Children of Jacob directly, highlighting the inherent contradiction in their attitude. It goes on to point out further contradictions between their present attitude and the terms of their covenant with God. (2:84)

But what have they done after that? (2:85)

The Children of Jacob Worship the Calf

Madinah: *And, certainly, Moses drew near you*
with the clear portents.
Again, you took the calf to yourselves after him.
And you are ones who are unjust. (2:92)
And mention when We took your solemn promise,
and We exalted the mount above you:
Take what We gave you with firmness and hear.
They said: We heard and we rebelled,
and they were steeped with love for the calf in their hearts
because of their ingratitude.
Say: Miserable was what commands you to it of your belief
if you had been ones who believe. (2:93)
Say: If the Last Abode for you had been with God
—that which is exclusively for you—
excluding others of humanity—
then, covet death if you had been ones who are sincere. (2:94)
And they never covet it ever because of what their hands put
forward, and God is Knowing of the ones who are unjust. (2:95)
And, certainly, you will find them
to be eager among humanity for this life,
even of those who ascribed partners with God.
Each one of them wishes that he be given
a long life of a thousand years,

yet he still would not be one who is drawn away
from the punishment,
even if he be given a long life,
and God is Seeing of what they do. (2:96)

The Children of Jacob Reminded of Their Blessings

Madinah: *O Children of Jacob!*
Remember My divine blessing
with which I was gracious to you,
and that I gave you an advantage over the worlds. (2:122)
And be God-conscious of a Day when no soul
will give recompense for another soul at all,
nor will the equivalent be accepted from it,
nor will intercession profit it,
nor will they be helped. (2:123)

Commentary°

Having delivered this decisive warning, the chapter now addresses the Children of Jacob with an amicable and sympathetic appeal, as a fitting end to this extensive debate concerning their history and religious conduct. (2:122-123)

The Children of Jacob Given Clear Signs

Madinah: *Ask the Children of Jacob how many a sign,*
a clear portent, We gave them.
And whoever substitutes the divine
blessing of God after it drew near him, then,
truly, God is Severe in repayment. (2:211)

*****

And, certainly, Moses drew near you with the clear portents.
Again, you took the calf to yourselves after him.
And you are ones who are unjust. (2:92)

The Enemy Weakened by God

Chapter 8: The 88th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *In like manner of the people of Pharaoh*
—and of those before them—
they were ungrateful for the signs of God
so God took them for their impieties.
Truly, God is Strong, Severe in repayment. (8:52)
Know that God will never be One Who Causes to Alter
a divine blessing when He was gracious to a folk

unless they first alter what is within themselves.
And, truly, God is Hearing, Knowing. (8:53)
In like manner of the people of Pharaoh,
and those before them, they denied the signs of their Lord,
so We caused them to perish for their impieties.
And We drowned the people of Pharaoh.
And they all had been ones who are unjust. (8:54)

Commentary°

The chapter then states a fundamental fact that is relevant to this scene. The infliction of suffering and humiliation on the ungrateful is a permanent law that does not change. It was set into operation a long time ago and it continues to operate without fail. (8:52) God does not determine the fate of human beings haphazardly or on the basis of sudden whims. Their fate follows a law that is meant to apply at all times. What happened to those unbelievers at Badr is likely to happen to them at all times. The same type of thing happened to Pharaoh's people and to other communities before them. They could not protect themselves against His punishment. (8:52)

The People of Pharaoh Deny

Chapter 3: The 89th Chapter Revealed

Madinah *Truly, those who were ungrateful,*
it will not avail them—neither their wealth nor their children—
against God at all. And those, they will be fuel for the fire, (3:10)
in like manner of the people of Pharaoh
and those who were before them.
They denied Our signs so God took them
because of their impiety.
And God is Severe in repayment. (3:11)

Commentary°

Indeed, wealth and children cannot be of any avail in this life, even when they are coupled with power and authority. (3:11) This case has had frequent parallels throughout history. God relates it in detail in this book. It is a case that outlines God's law, which applies to those who reject His revelations as lies. He implements this law as He wills. Hence, no one who rejects God's revelations can have any immunity or safeguard

The Food Allowed the Children of Jacob

Madinah: *All food had been allowed*
to the Children of Jacob. but what Jacob,

forbade to himself before the Torah is sent down.
Say: Then, approach with the Torah and recount it
if you had been ones who are sincere. (3:93)

Commentary°

Abraham did not eat camel's meat nor drink its milk. . . All food was lawful to the Children of Jacob save what Jacob (Israel) forbade for himself, namely, camels: when he was afflicted with sciatica, he made a vow that if he were cured he would not eat of it again, and so it was forbidden him; before the Torah was revealed, which was after the time of Abraham, as it was not unlawful in his time, as they claimed.

The Affliction of Moses

Chapter 33: The 90th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *O those who believed!*
Be not like those who maligned Moses.
God declared him innocent of what they said.
And he had been well-esteemed with God. (33:69)

Commentary°

The chapter directs the believers to say only what is just, true and accurate. They should make sure of what they say and its effects, before they accept what the hypocrites and spreaders of lies say, and before they pay attention to any wild accusation or evil fabrication against the Prophet, their leader and guide. It directs them to say right words leading to right action. God takes care of those who make sure of saying what is right, proper and accurate, guiding their footsteps and making their deeds sound, producing good results. God also forgives the sins of those who say what is right and do righteous deeds, for even they are not immune to slips and errors. They are all human, and by nature humans err and need God's forgiveness.

Violation of the Covenant by the Children of Jacob

Chapter 4: The 92nd Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *The People of the Book ask you*
that you have sent down to them a Book from heaven.
Surely, they had asked Moses for greater than that.
Then, they said: Cause us to see God publicly.
So a thunderbolt took them for their injustice.
Again, they took the calf to themselves
after what drew near to them

—the clear portents.
Even so We pardoned that.
And We gave Moses a clear authority. (4:153)
And We exalted the mount above them for their solemn promise.
And We said to them: Enter the door
as ones who prostrate themselves.
And We said to them: Disregard not the Sabbath!
And We took from them an earnest solemn promise (4:154)
for their breaking their solemn promise and for their
ingratitude for the signs of God
and their killing the Prophets without right
and their saying: Our hearts are encased.
Nay! God has set a seal on them for their ingratitude
—so they believe not but a few (4:155)

God Spoke Directly to Moses

Madinah: *And God spoke directly to Moses,*
speaking directly. (4:164)

Commentary°

If Moses was spoken to directly by God, this was simply one aspect of revelation and none of us knows how it happened. The Quran, which is the only authentic source we have on such matters, has not given us any details. The only thing we know is that God gave this revelation in words. How and in what manner or in what sense or power Moses used to receive it we do not know. All that is part of the knowledge God has kept to Himself. If the Quran does not speak to us about it, then any interpretation is simply guesswork lacking foundation.

Moses Said to His People

Chapter 61: The 109th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *And when Moses said to his folk:*
O my folk! Why malign me while, surely,
you know that I am the Messenger of God to you?
So when they swerved, God caused their hearts to swerve.
And God guides not the folk, the ones who disobey. (61:5)

Commentary°

Moses was the one who saved the Children of Jacob from Pharaoh and his tyranny. He was God's Messenger to them, their leader and teacher. Yet the grief that they caused him was of the ex-

tended type, taking many colors and forms. His struggle to put them on the right course was hard, tiring and trying. In the accounts the Quran gives of Moses and his people we read about the different aspects of the grief they caused him and how hard he had to struggle to reform their belief system.

For example, they discouraged Moses' efforts to persuade Pharaoh to let them go free. So whilst he exposed himself to Pharaohs wrath, they were safe having accepted their lot and humiliation. They even blamed Moses for worsening their plight:. (7:129) The suggestion being that they did not see much good coming their way as a result of his message, or that they blamed him for this latest round of oppression.

No sooner did Moses, guided by God, deliver them from Pharaoh's humiliation—He caused Pharaoh and his people to drown before their very eyes—than they inclined themselves to a type of worship akin to Pharaoh's people. (7: 138) Again, Moses had not been gone long for the appointment with his Lord to receive the tablets when the Samaritan led them astray. (20: 88)

They were also dissatisfied with their desert food, which was manna and quails. Thus they complained to their Prophet that they wanted more than one kind of food. (2:61) Mention should also be made here of the cow they were required to slaughter, yet they continued to demand explanations, seeking excuses and behaving impolitely to their Prophet and to their Lord. (2:71)

They requested that a day be assigned to them when they would not work. But when the Sabbath was ordained for them, they violated its rules. Later, when they were close to the Holy Land, which God told them they would enter, they stalled, not daring to go forward, while at the same time they spoke insolently to Moses saying they would not enter the land until those who were there left. (5:22) He kept encouraging them, assuring them of the great success awaiting them, if they would only do what God had bidden them to do. Nonetheless, their insolence and disbelief reached new heights. (5:24)

They gave Moses much more grief, putting questions to him, making suggestions, and even starting a rebellion. The chapter mentions here how Moses remonstrated with them in a friendly way. (61:5) They knew for certain that he was God's Messenger, but he did not put this fact across in a strong and assertive way. Rather, he simply gave them a remonstrating reminder. The result was that they swerved from the right way after being given every possible means of sticking to it. Hence, God let them go further astray and their hearts were no longer fit to receive guidance. (61:5)

The Children of Jacob Break the Covenant

Chapter 5: The 112th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *And mention when Moses said to his folk:*
O my folk!
Remember the divine blessing of God on you
when He assigned Prophets among you and assigned kings
and gives you what He gave not to anyone of the worlds. (5:20)
O my folk! Enter the region, one that is sanctified,
that God prescribed for you and go not back, turning your back,
for, then, you will turn about as ones who are losers. (5:21)
They said: O Moses! Truly, in it is a haughty folk
and we will never enter it until they go forth from it,
but if they go forth from it, then,
we will, certainly, be ones who enter. (5:22)
Two men to whom God was gracious said
among those who fear to disobey:
Enter on them through the door!
And when you entered it, you will, certainly,
be ones who are victors.
And put your trust in God
if you had been ones who believe. (5:23)
They said: O Moses! We will never enter it
as long as they continued in it,
so you and your Lord, you two go and fight.
We are here, ones who sit at home. (5:24)
He said: My Lord! I control no one but myself
and my brother so separate You between us
and between the folk, the ones who disobey. (5:25)
He said: Truly, it is that which is forbidden to them for forty years.
They will wander about the earth.
So grieve not for the folk, the ones who disobey. (5:26)

Commentary°

At this point in the chapter, the attitude of the Children of Jacob towards God's Messenger sent to them, Moses (peace be upon him), is given. Moses was their savior who led them out of Egypt towards the holy land God had assigned to them. The chapter also exposes their attitude to the covenant they made with their Lord and how they violated it and were punished for that violation

Moses' words (5:20-21) give us the impression that he may have been worried lest his people disobey. He had tried them before on several occasions. He had led them out of Egypt, liberated them from subjugation with God's help, who parted the sea for them and caused

Pharaoh and his soldiers to drown. Nevertheless, when they came by a community engaged in pagan worship, they said to him: Moses, set up a deity for us as these people have deities. (7: 138)

On another occasion, he had hardly left them for his appointment with his Lord when the Samaritan used the jewelery stolen from Egyptian women to make them an effigy of the calf which made a lowing sound. They started to worship the calf and claimed that it was the god Moses went to meet.

Another experience which Moses remembered well was when God made springs of water gush out for them in the desert and sent down to them manna and quail, a very wholesome food to eat. Nonetheless, they wanted to have the types of food they were familiar with in Egypt, the land where they were humiliated. They asked Moses to pray to God to bring forth for them herbs, cucumber, garlic, lentils and onions. They would not sacrifice their familiar food for a life of dignity, liberation and the pursuit of a noble goal. He also tested them when he conveyed to them God's order to slaughter a cow but they kept postponing the implementation of this order.

When they finally slaughtered it, they did so most reluctantly. When he returned from his appointment with his Lord carrying the tablets that outlined the covenant they should make with God, they refused to make that covenant and fulfill their pledges to their Lord. Despite what God had bestowed on them and the forgiveness of their sins which He granted them, they did not give their pledges until they saw with their own eyes the mountain raised over their heads, and felt that it was about to fall on top of them.

Moses had tested them on several occasions and now they were close to the holy land, their destination. God had promised them they would be the rulers in this land and that He would raise up among them Prophets so that they remained in God's care. Moses, however, was worried lest they should disobey. He, therefore, coupled this, his last appeal with a reminder of the happiest memories, best incentives and strongest warnings. (5:20-21)

God's promise never fails. He promises here to raise up Prophets among them and to make them kings. The fulfillment of this promise brought them what God granted to no other nation until that period in time. The holy land, which they were approaching, was assigned to them by God's promise, which meant that they were certain to have it. They had already known from experience that God always fulfils His promises. Now, they were called upon to meet the conditions for yet another of His promises. To turn back was sure to bring them to ruin. (5:22)

Victory, however, does not come in this manner as the Jews

wanted. (5:23) The value of having faith and of being God-conscious appears very clearly. These were two men who feared God, and being God-fearing made them totally fearless when they confronted mighty people. They had all the courage needed to dispel the imaginary danger. They made this testimony, highlighting the importance of faith and the time of trial and difficulty. They wanted to show what it meant to fear God alone at times when people fear each other. God does not combine the two feelings of fear in any one person's heart: fearing Him and fearing human beings. A person who fears God fears no one else.

This is a basic rule (5:23) in how to fight the enemy. The Jews are advised here to launch an offensive which takes them right through into the other people's homes. Once they are in, the others will be demoralized while their own morale will be high indeed. Those attacked will suffer a total loss of confidence and the attackers will win. (5:23)

A believer relies on no one other than God. This is the distinctive mark and the correlative of faith. But who were these two men addressing them with these true words? They were after all addressing the Children of Jacob. (5:24)

A perfect example of weak people (5:24) who realize that rudeness costs nothing but words. Fulfillment of their duty, on the other hand, requires them to fight in a real war. He is, then, not their Lord if his lordship means that they will have to fight. We neither desire a kingdom, nor sovereignty, nor even the promised holy land, if it means that we will have to fight these mighty people.

This is now the end for Moses (peace be upon him) after the strenuous efforts he exerted with the Children of Jacob and after bearing all impudence and deviation. The result was simply to turn back, to turn away from the holy land when they stood at its doors. This was a clear violation of the covenant they had made with God. But the covenant applied to Moses also. What should he do now? Whose help should he seek?

This is a prayer uttered in pain. (5:25) It is an appeal to God and one of total submission to Him. It also expresses total determination and a total break with those who disobeyed.

God answered His Prophet's prayer and pronounced His judgment of the wrongdoers. (5:26) As they approached the holy land which God had promised them, He abandoned them to their aimless wandering. He forbade them the land He had assigned to them. The weightier view suggests that the land was forbidden to that particular generation of them, until a new generation came of age, aware of the lessons and strengthened by their upbringing in the desert. The first

generation had long been used to subjugation and tyranny in Egypt. As such, it could not shoulder the tough responsibility. Tyranny and humiliation corrupt the nature of individuals as well as communities.

Some of the Children of Jacob Are Ones Who Are Excessive on the Earth

Madinah: O*n account of that*
(i.e. Cain killing his brother Abel),
We prescribed for the Children of Jacob
that whoever killed a person,
other than in retribution for another person,
or because of corruption
in and on the earth, it will be as if he had killed all of humanity.
And whoever gave life to one, it will be as if he gave life
to all of humanity. And, certainly, our Messengers drew near them
with the clear portents. Again, truly, many of them after that were
ones who were excessive in and on the earth. (5:32)

Commentary°

[This sign] then makes use of the profundity of relating this story by enhancing a positive response to the legislation enacted to deal with such a crime. The legislation achieves the dual purpose of weakening the motive to commit a murder and establishing the just punishment for such a crime whenever it takes place. (5:32)

This type of person exists and aggression is committed against peaceful and good- natured people who harbor neither grudges nor ill-feelings towards others. A reminder and a warning may achieve nothing with those who have an evil nature. Adopting a peaceful attitude may not be sufficient to prevent aggression. For all this, the ghastly crime of killing one person is considered so grave and so sordid that it is equated with the crime of killing all humanity. On the other hand, efforts to prevent killing and to spare the life of one person are considered a great action, equal to saving all humanity. The law given to the Children of Jacob included this principle that equates the life of any human being with every life. The right to live is applicable to all. Hence, killing one person is an aggression against the right to live in which all people stand equal. Similarly, preventing murder and sparing the life of one person, either through defending the would-be victim or inflicting the death penalty on the killer in order to prevent the murder of another, is to save the basic right of life applicable to all.

The Children of Jacob Gave a Solemn Promise

Madinah: *Certainly, We took a solemn promise*
from the Children of Jacob and We sent Messengers to them.
Whenever a Messenger drew near them
with what they themselves yearn not for,
a group of people denied them
and a group of people kill them. (5:70)

Commentary°

[This sign] gives us an account of a part of the history of the Children of Jacob, the Jews, that shows that they have nothing to stand on and that the message of Islam must be conveyed to them so that they have a chance to believe in the Divine faith. On the other hand, this history shows the Muslims that the nature of the Jews has not changed. Hence, the importance of the Jews will be reduced in their minds and they will not condone any alliance or patronage when they have such an attitude to the truth and to faith: "Surely, We accepted a solemn pledge from the Children of Jacob, and We sent to them Messengers. But every time a Messenger came to them with something that was not to their liking, [they rebelled:] some they denounced as liars and some they put to death. They reckoned no harm would come to them, so they were willfully blind and deaf [to the truth]. Thereafter, God accepted their repentance: still many of them acted blind and deaf. But God sees all that they do. (5:70-1)

Aaron

Aaron Appointed as a Minister

Chapter 25: The 42nd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We gave Moses the Book*
and assigned his brother Aaron to him as a minister. (25:35)
And We said: You both go to the folk who denied Our signs.
Then, We destroyed them, an utter destruction. (25:36)

Aaron Appointed as a Prophet

Chapter 19: The 44th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And We proclaimed to him*
from the right edge of the mount
and We brought him near privately. (19:52)
And We bestowed on him out of Our mercy
his brother Aaron, a Prophet. (19:53)

Aaron's Encounter with Pharaoh

Chapter 20: The 45th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Then, the ones who are sorcerers were cast down,*
ones who prostrate themselves.
They said: We believed in the Lord of Aaron and Moses. (20:70)

Aaron and the Samarian

Makkah: *And, certainly, Aaron said to them before:*
O my folk! You were only tempted by it.
And, truly, your Lord is The Merciful.
So follow me and obey my command. (20:90)
They said: We will never quit it as ones who give ourselves up
until Moses returns to us. (20:91)
*[Moses] said: O Aaron! What prevented **you***
*when **you** had seen them going astray?* (20:92)
*that **you** have followed me not?*
*Have **you**, then, rebelled against my command?* (20:93)

Aaron More Oratorical in Language

Chapter 28: The 48th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And my brother Aaron,*
he is more oratorical in language than I,
so send him with me as a helpmate to establish me as true.
Truly, I fear that they will deny me. (28:34)
*He said: We will strengthen **your**arm through **your** brother*

and assign to you both authority
so that they reach not out to you both.
With Our signs, you two and
whoever followed you two will be
the ones who are victors. (28:35)

Moses and Aaron Raised Up to Pharaoh and His Council

Chapter 10: The 51st Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Again, We raised up after them Moses and Aaron*
to Pharaoh and his Council with Our signs.
Then, they grew arrogant,
and they had been a folk, ones who sin. (10:75)
So when The Truth drew near them from Us,
they said: Truly, this is clear sorcery! (10:76)
Moses said: Say you this about The Truth
when it drew near you? Is this sorcery?
And the ones who are sorcerers will not prosper. (10:77)
They said: Had you drawn near to us
to turn us from what we found our fathers on
so that the domination on the earth might be for you two?
We are not ones who believe in both of you. (10:78)
And Pharaoh said: Bring to me every one
who is a knowing sorcerer. (10:79)

Moses Among the Offspring of Abraham

Chapter 6: The 55th Chapter Revealed

And We bestowed on him Isaac and Jacob.
Each of them We guided.
And Noah We guided before and among his offspring
are David and Solomon and Job and Joseph
and Moses and Aaron. And, thus, We gave recompense
to the ones who are doers of good. (6:84)

God's Blessings on Moses and Aaron

Chapter 37: The 56th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly We showed Our grace*
to Moses and Aaron. (37:114)
And We delivered them and their folk
from the tremendous distress (37:115)
and helped them so that they, they
had been the ones who are victors. (37:116)
And We gave them the manifest Book (37:117)

and guided them to the straight path. (37:118)
We left for them a good name with the later ones: (37:119)
Peace be on Moses and Aaron! (37:120)
Truly, thus, We give recompense
to the ones who are doers of good. (37:121)
Truly, they were of Our servants, ones who believe. (37:122)

Moses and Aaron Given the Criterion

Chapter 21: The 73rd Chapter Revealed

And, certainly, We gave Moses and Aaron
the Criterion between right and wrong
and an illumination and a Remembrance
for the ones who are God-conscious, (21:48)

Moses and Aaron sent to Pharaoh

Chapter 23: The 74th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Again, We sent Moses and his brother Aaron*
with Our signs and clear authority (23:45)
to Pharaoh and his Council.
Then, they grew arrogant and they had been a folk,
ones who exalt themselves. (23:46)
Then, they said: Will we believe in two mortals like ourselves
while their folk are ones who worship us? (23:47)
So they denied both of them.
They had been among the ones who are caused to perish. (23:48)
And, certainly, We gave Moses the Book
so that perhaps they will be truly guided. (23:49)

The Town Bordering the Sea

Chapter 7: The 39th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And ask them about the town*
—that which had been bordering the sea—
when they disregarded the Sabbath,
when their great fish would approach them
on the day of the Sabbath,
one that was visible on the shore.
And the day they keep not the Sabbath, they approach them not.
Thus, We try them because they had been disobeying. (7:163)
And mention when a community of them said:
Why admonish a folk whom God is
One Who Causes them to Perish or
One Who Punishes them with a severe punishment.
They said: To be free from guilt before your Lord
and so that perhaps they will be God-conscious. (7:164)
So when they forgot of what they were reminded,
We rescued those who prohibited evil
and We took those who did wrong with a terrifying punishment
because they had been disobeying. (7:165)
Then, when they defied
what they were prohibited We said to them:
Be you apes, ones who are driven away. (7:166)
*And mention when **your** Lord caused to be proclaimed*
that He would, surely, raise up against them
until the Day of Resurrection
who cause an affliction to befall on them of a dire punishment
*Truly, **your** Lord is Swift in repayment.*
And, truly, He is Forgiving, Compassionate. (7:167)
And We sundered them in the region into communities.
Some of them were the ones in accord with morality
and others were other than that.
And We tried them with benevolence and evil deeds
so that perhaps they will return to obedience. (7:168)
Then, after that succeeded successors who inherited the Book.
They take advantage of this nearer world,
and they say: We will be forgiven.
And if an advantage approaches them like it,
they will take it. Is not a solemn promise
taken from them with the Book
that they would say about God only The Truth?
And studied they not what is in it, and know that
the Last Abode is better for those who are God-conscious?

Will you not, then, be reasonable? (7:169)
And those who keep fast to the Book
and performed the formal prayer,
We will not waste the compensation
of the ones who make things right. (7:170)
Mention when We shook up the mountain over them,
as if it had been an overshadowing,
and they thought it was that which would fall on them:
It was said: Take with firmness what We gave you
and remember what is in it
so that perhaps you will be God-conscious. (7:171)

Jethro (Shuayb)

The Message of Jethro

Chapter 7: The 39th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And to Midian God sent*
their brother Jethro (Shuayb).
He said: O my folk! Worship God!
You have no god other than He.
Surely, a clear portent drew near you from your Lord
so live up to the full measure and the balance
and diminish not the things of humanity
nor make corruption in and on the earth
after things were made right.
That will be better for you
if you had been ones who believe. (7:85)
And sit not by every path intimidating
and barring from the way of God
those who believed in Him and you desire it to be crooked.
And remember when you had been few and He augmented you.
And look on how had been the Ultimate End
of the ones who make corruption. (7:86)
And if there had been a section of you who believed in
what I was sent with and a section believe not,
have patience until God gives judgment between us.
And He is Best of the ones who judge. (7:87)
Said the Council of those who grew arrogant from among his folk.
*O Jethro! We will, certainly, drive **you** out—*
*and those who believed with **you**—*
from our town or else you revert to our creed.
He said: Even if we had been ones who dislike it? (7:88)
Surely, we would have devised a lie against God
if we reverted to your creed after God delivered us from it.
And it will not be for us that we revert to it unless God,
our Lord, wills. Our Lord encompassed everything in knowledge.
In God we put our trust.
Our Lord! Give victory between us and between our folk in Truth
*and **You** are Best of the ones who are deliverers.* (7:89)
But said the Council of those who were ungrateful
among his folk:
If you followed Jethro ,
then, truly, you will be ones who are losers. (7:90)
Then, the quaking of the earth took them

and they came to be in the morning
ones who are fallen prostrate in their abodes. (7:91)
Those who denied Jethro had been
as if they had not dwelt in them. Those who denied Jethro
they, they had been the ones who were losers. (7:92)
So he turned away from them and said:
O my folk! Certainly I have expressed to you messages
of my Lord and I have advised you.
Then how should I grieve for a folk,
ones who are ungrateful? (7:93)

Commentary°

So the journey continues and the story unfolds. The long line of noble advocates of faith, formed by God's Messengers, call out with compassion to erring humanity, reminding them of the truth and warning them against following a course that is certain to lead to ruin. But those who are deep in error confront this compassionate address with rejection at first and later with force, persecution and tyranny. When God's Messengers have fulfilled their duties of reminding and warning, standing up to opposition and persecution by their peoples, ultimately moving away and declaring their allegiance to faith, God Himself takes over the conduct of the fight.

[These signs] gives accounts of the Prophets Noah, Hud, Salih, Lot and Shuayb with their respective communities. They all present one never-changing truth. (7:59, 65, 73, 85) Their people argued with them, rejecting the very concept of God's Oneness and His being the only Lord in the universe. They also wondered about God sending human Messengers. Some of them argued that religion had nothing to do with people's lives or with the regulation of financial and business transactions. This is echoed by some people in today's state of ignorance (*jahiliyyah*), despite the passage of many centuries. They describe their old, ignorant and futile argument as 'liberalism,' and 'progress'. At the end of each account, the [signs] show the fate of those who rejected God's message.

When we look carefully at the way these stories are presented, we cannot fail to note that all Messengers said the same words to their communities: My people, worship God alone: you have no deity other than Him. Every Messenger presents this central truth to his people in the manner of a caring and honest adviser who fears for his people the inevitable doom of which they remain oblivious. None of these communities appreciated the advice given by their Messenger. None thought about their fate. None recognized the profound sincerity of their Messenger, nor of his having no personal interest in the matter.

At this point we may refer to the first account of the Prophet Noah (7:59-64) and the last one referring to the Prophet Shuayb (7:85-93). These two show the truth of the single faith which all God's Messengers preached, each to his own people. All received the same rejection by people in power and their weak followers. In each account we cannot fail to note the clarity and power of faith in the hearts of the Messenger and the believers who follow him, or the Messenger's keen desire to guide his people to the truth, or his taking a stand away from them after having completed his mission.

The Message of Jethro

Chapter 11: The 52nd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And We sent to Midian their brother Jethro.*
He said: O my folk! Worship God. You have no god other than He.
And reduce not the measuring vessel and balance.
Truly, I consider you as good. And, truly, I fear for you
the punishment of an Enclosing Day. (11:84)
And O my folk! Live up to the measuring vessel
and balance in equity. And diminish not of humanity their things.
And do no mischief in and on the earth
as ones who make corruption. (11:85)
God's abiding wisdom is best for you
if you had been ones who believe.
And I am not a Guardian over you. (11:86)
*They said: O Shuayb! Is it that **your** formal prayer*
*commands **you** that we leave what our fathers worship*
or that we accomplish not with our possibilities whatever we will?
*Truly,**you** are the forbearing, the well-intentioned.* (11:87)
He said: O my folk! Considered you that I had been
with a clear portent from my Lord.
He provided me fairer provision from Himself.
And I want not to go against you in what I prohibit you.
I want only making things right so far as I was able.
And my success is not but from God.
In Him I put my trust and to Him I am penitent. (11:88)
And O my folk! Let not your breach with me drive you into being
lit on by the like of what lit on a folk of Noah or a folk of Hud or a
folk of Salih. And a folk of Lot are not far from you. (11:89)
And ask for forgiveness from your Lord.
Again, repent to Him.
Truly, my Lord is Compassionate, Loving. (11:90)
They said: O Jethro! We understand not much
*of what **you** say*

*And, truly, we see **you** weak among us.*
*If it had not been for **your** extended family,*
*we would have stoned **you***
*And **you** are not mighty against us.* (11:91)
He said: O my folk! Is my extended family mightier to you
than God whom you took to yourselves to disregard?
Truly, my Lord is One Who Encloses whatever you do. (11:92)
O my folk! Act according to your ability
and, truly, I am one who acts.
You will know to whom approaches a punishment
covering him with shame and who, he is one who lies.
And be on the watch! Truly, I am watching with you. (11:93)
And Our command drew near. We delivered Jethro
and those who believed with him by a mercy from Us.
And the Cry took those who did wrong.
It came to be in the morning in their abodes
ones who are fallen prostrate, (11:94)
as if they had not dwelled in them.
Away with the Midian just as Thamud was done away. (11:95)

Commentary°

Submission to God alone (11:84) is the first article of faith as well as the first rule of life and the first principle of law and human transactions. It is the principle without which faith, worship or human dealings cannot take their proper shape.

The main issue here is honesty and justice, which comes second only to the issue of faith and submission to God. (11:84-11:86) In other words, it is the issue of the law that governs business dealings on the basis of faith. The people of Midian, whose country was an enclave of land lying between Hijaz and Syria, used to give short measure and weight, thus wronging other people in respect of what was rightfully theirs. That is, they used to give other people less than the value of their goods. Their misconduct reflected badly on their integrity and honor and showed that they were far from clean both externally and at heart. Their geographical position meant that they were able to control the trade route of the caravans moving between the north and the south of Arabia. This enabled them to dictate unfair terms on other peoples" trade.

Here we see the link between believing in God's oneness and submission to Him alone on the one hand, and honesty, fair-trading, honorable transactions and combating all kinds of cheating and stealing, whether perpetrated by individuals or governments, on the other. This relationship appears to be a safeguard ensuring a better human

life, justice and peace among people. It is the only safeguard based on fearing God and seeking His pleasure. Hence, it has a very solid foundation that cannot be influenced by special interests or personal desires.

In the Islamic view, business dealings, and morality generally, must have a solid basis that is not influenced by changeable factors. Thus Islam differs fundamentally with all other social and moral theories devised by human beings and governed by their differing bents of thought and their temporary interest.

When business dealings and morality have such a solid basis, they are not influenced by immediate or material interests or by differing environments with different factors and considerations. Hence, rules of morality and those that govern human dealings are not subject to whether people are nomadic, agrarian or industrialized. Such changeable factors lose their influence on the moral concepts of society or the moral values that govern business transactions when the basis of legislation for all spheres of life is divine law. Then the essential basis of morality is to seek God's pleasure, hoping to win His reward and avoid His punishment. All that is advanced by human-made theories and doctrines about morality being the product of the economic situation and the social conditions prevailing in a particular society become meaningless in the light of Islamic moral theory.

God has given you ample provision for your sustenance, so you have no need to indulge in vile practices to add to your riches. (Verse 84) You will not become poor if you give full measure and weight and give people what is rightfully theirs. Your happy state is indeed threatened by your cheating practices and your unlawful earnings. (11:84) This may come on the Day of Judgment, or it may indeed occur in this life when your cheating practices yield their bitter fruits and rebound on your society and your trade. People will then suffer injustice brought about by some of them against others.

Shuayb repeats his advice positively after having expressed it in the form of a prohibition. (11:85)

To give full measure and weight is more expressive than not falling short on both of them. It is closer to giving others more than their due. Different forms of expression have different connotations and leave different effects. The effect of giving full measure and full weight is much more kindly than that of not falling short.

This is much more general (Verse 85) than what is valued according to measure and weight. It stresses the fair evaluation of everything which belongs to others, whether this evaluation is in weight, measure, price or otherwise. It also includes material as well as moral evaluations. It may be said to further encompass actions

and personal qualities. The Arabic term used here includes both the material and the abstract.

When people suffer maltreatment in respect of what rightfully belongs to them, this gives rise to bitterness, grudges and despair. Such feelings can only ruin society and destroy social links as they adversely affect consciences and hearts. They leave no room for anything good in life.

(11:85) They must not willingly seek to spread corruption because it rebounds on them. Instead, their hearts should awaken to something far better and far more rewarding than their stained earnings. (11:86) What is with God is far better and lasts much longer. At the outset, Shuayb called on his people to worship God alone. He reminds them of this here, when he mentions their lasting reward that they will receive from God if they respond to his call, and follow his advice in their business dealings. After all, his advice is part of that faith.

Having called on them to believe in God alone, he leaves them to Him, declaring that he cannot influence their destiny, and is not their guardian. He is not responsible for preventing them from error and is not answerable for their erroneous practices, should they choose to indulge in them. His task is to convey his message to them, which he has done. (11:86) This expression awakens the addressees to the gravity of the matter and to their heavy responsibility. It puts them face to face with what awaits them in the end, when they will have no guardian or intermediary.

The people of Midian were hardened in their corrupt practices. Their reply was sarcastic. Every word of it smacked of sarcasm. Yet it also indicated their ignorance and mulish obstinacy. (11:87) They did not realize, nor wanted to realize, that prayers are required by faith, as a manifestation of true submission to God. Faith cannot be established without the recognition of God's oneness and the renunciation of everything else they or their forefathers worshipped. Likewise, it cannot be established unless God's legislation in matters of trade and finance, as well as in all spheres of life, are implemented. All these are a complete whole, and faith cannot be separated from prayers or legislation which caters for all aspects of human life.

The people of Midian, who had such an ill-conceived idea of the connection between faith and worship, and between the two and business transactions lived a long time ago. But rather than denounce their attitude at length we should remind ourselves that people today stick to certain concepts which are not much different from those of Shuayb's people. The world of jahiliyyah which we see around us today is not much better or more intelligent than the earlier one. The

sort of ascription of Godhead to other beings alongside God, which was practiced by Shuayb's people, is still practiced today by most of mankind, including those who claim to be Jews, Christians, or Muslims. All try to establish a barrier separating faith and worship on the one hand and law and business transactions on the other. They claim that faith and worship belong to God and should be conducted according to His instructions, while the law and business do not concern Him. These should be conducted according to the bidding of some other authority. This is indeed the essence of attributing partners to God.

We must not forget that the Jews today are the only people who are determined to conduct their transactions according to their faith and religious law.

We find among us today some who claim to be Muslim questioning the validity of any link between faith and morality, especially when they consider financial dealings. Some of our intellectuals who have higher degrees awarded by various universities affect amazement as they wonder: what has Islam got to do with personal affairs? Why should Islam be concerned with how we dress on the beach, or how a woman appears in public, or how we satisfy our sexual urges? Why should Islam concern itself with drinking a glass of wine, or indeed with anything done by those who classify themselves as civilized? Now we ask what is the difference between such questions and those put by the people of Midian to their Prophet Shuayb (11:87)

The second part of their question implies a very strong objection to religion having anything to do with the economy. To them, business dealings have no connection whatsoever with faith or even with moral values, taken separately from faith. Why should religion be concerned with financial transactions or with devious business methods which evade man-made laws? Indeed these people, living in our midst, arrogantly claim that the economy would collapse if moral values were allowed to interfere with it. They object even to some Western economic theories, such as the moral theory, and label it as confused reactionary thinking.

Let us then not claim for ourselves a standard much higher than that of the people of Midian in their ancient jahiliyyah, when we live today in an even darker jahiliyyah which boasts of its enlightenment, advanced knowledge and civilization. Our state of jahiliyyah today motivates many among us to accuse those who maintain that there is an important link which groups together faith in God, personal behavior in all spheres of life and financial dealings, of being reactionary, advocating obsolete ideas.

Faith in God's oneness cannot be rightly and firmly established in people's hearts when God's laws, which regulate individual behavior and social and financial dealings, are abandoned in favor of manmade laws. It is not possible for faith and unfaith to coexist in the same heart side by side. Unfaith, or the acknowledgement of other gods alongside God, can take different forms such as the ones which prevail in our societies today. This still represents the acknowledgement of other gods, which is a criterion common to all unbelievers throughout history.

The people of Midian were sarcastic when they addressed their Prophet Shuayb, just as certain people today resort to sarcasm when they speak of those who advocate submission to God alone in all affairs. They said to Shuayb. (11:87) They obviously meant the opposite. To them, wisdom and right meant that they should follow in their fathers" footsteps and worship the same gods they worshipped. It also meant that they should separate worship from business. The same ideas are advocated by present-day intellectuals who do not hide their sarcasm when they speak of the advocates of Islam and describe them as reactionary.

Shuayb, fully confident of the truth of his message, and aware of his people's ignorance and short-sightedness, does not let their sarcasm affect him. On the contrary, he seeks to inform them politely that he takes his stand on clear evidence from his Lord, which he feels in his innermost heart. He explains to them that he is fully confident of the truth of what he advocates because his knowledge far exceeds theirs. When he calls on them to stick to honest dealings, the effects of such honesty also apply to him since he is a businessman. He is after no personal gain which he seeks to realize for himself. He does not intend to do behind their backs what he has forbidden them so that he enjoys a market free from competition. His call is one of reform which includes himself. The path he enjoins them to follow will not cause them any losses, as they mistakenly think.

He said: Think, my people! If I take my stand on a clear evidence from my Lord and He has provided me with goodly sustenance which He alone can give? I have no desire to do, in opposition to you, what I ask you not to do. All that I desire is to set things to rights in so far as it lies within my power. My success depends on God alone. In Him have I placed my trust, and to Him I always turn." (11:88)

Shuayb addresses them in a friendly and appealing way, reminding them of his close links with them. (Verse 88) I am after no personal gain that I may realize by so doing. (11:88)

It is, then, the general reform of society that Shuayb is after. It is a reform that brings benefit to every individual and every community. Some may think that to adhere to moral values and implement the divine law may make them lose some chances that may be open to them, or lose some gain that they would otherwise achieve. But implementing the divine law can only make them lose evil gains and wicked opportunities. It compensates them with goodly gains and lawful provisions. It also establishes a society that is characterized by the co-operation of its individuals. It is a society that is free from grudges, treachery and selfish quarrels.

He alone can grant me success, as He knows my intentions and the sincerity of my efforts. (11:88) From Him alone I seek help to overcome the difficulties that may beset me and to Him alone I submit my work and efforts.

Shuayb then tries another way of reminding them of the truth. He reminds them of the doom that befell the peoples of Noah, Hud, Salih and Lot. This may open their hardened hearts in a way which rational, cool and well-argued reminders may not. (11:89)

He tells them that they must not let their opposition to him harden their attitude of blind rejection. He says to them plainly that he fears that they may bring upon themselves a doom that is not unlike that which befell earlier communities. He reminds them especially of the people of Lot who lived close by and who had recently been destroyed.

When he has raised this prospect before them he then opens the doors to forgiveness and repentance. He uses the kindest and gentles terms in order to assure them of God's mercy and compassion. (11:90)

Thus Shuayb tries all methods of admonition and remonstration in the hope that his people's hearts will open up and respond to the truth. They, however, are so hardened in their erring ways and in their misconceptions of values and motives that their response remains negative. We have seen an example of their response in their mocking at Shuayb and his prayer.

(11:91) The people of Midian made it clear to Shuayb that they were fed up with him and with his message. They did not want to know anything about the truth he was presenting and did not care for anything which differed with their attitude to life or with their practices. Thus, in their view, only physical strength mattered. Plain truth was of no real significance, regardless of the strength of its argument, if it was not supported by physical power. What restrained them from doing so was the fact that they reckoned with the power of Shuayb's clan and family who were supposed to come to his defense. They did

not reckon with the power of God who would not leave His messenger to the mercy of His enemies. They had no respect for him as a noble person, nor for his own strength. They only had to consider what his clan might do if anything happened to him.

When people are devoid of proper faith, sound values and noble ideals, they care nothing for anything beyond their immediate interests or their material well-being. To them, any good cause or apparent truth has no sanctity whatsoever. They do not hesitate to assault the advocates of God's cause if these have no apparent power to protect them.

Shuayb was angry with his people for their arrogance towards God. He made it clear that he did not derive his power from his clan or family. He confronted them with their misjudgment of the true powers which can influence things in the universe, and pointed out to them that their insolence would not benefit them with God, aware as He always is of people's actions. Shuayb said his last word and parted ways with his people on the basis that there was no common ground of faith between them. He warned them against the suffering that befell all people who adopted their attitude and then left them to their destiny.

(11:92) Any group of people, strong and powerful as they may be, are, after all, human, subject to God's power. Hence, they are weak. How can you then give such a group of human beings more importance than you give to God? How can you fear them more than you fear Him? ""You have turned your backs on Him."" This is an image of physical rejection that heightens the enormity of their error. They turn their backs on God who has created them and who has given them all the goods they enjoy in this life. Their attitude is one of ingratitude and insolence as much as it is one of rejection of faith.

The Arabic expression used here gives an image of complete and perfect knowledge, as well as complete and overall power. Angry at his people's impudence towards God, Shuayb takes the proper attitude of a true believer. He does not find any gratification or reassurance in the fact that his own family and clan enjoyed such respect and power that afforded him protection from possible assault. This is evidence of true faith. A true believer finds no real power or protection other than that given him by God. He is unhappy to have a community to protect him, which is held in awe by others, when God, his Lord, is not held in awe. The true loyalty of a person who submits himself to God is not to his clan or nation; it is to God and to his faith. This is the parting point between the Islamic concept of loyalties and the un-Islamic one.

Shuayb's anger and his disavowal of any protection given him

by anyone other than God prompt him to challenge his people and then disassociate himself from them totally. (11:93) He challenges them to do what they can, to go along their way to the end. He will work according to his method and program. Time will tell who will suffer and who will prosper. The way he throws down his challenge and invites them to watch for the outcome tells of his absolute trust in God.

The curtains fall here to open up again when the issue is finally resolved. We see the people of Midian prostrate, lifeless in their homes, after having been overtaken by a dreadful cry, similar to that which overwhelmed the Thamud, Salih's people. There is great similarity between what happened to both peoples. In both cases, their houses were no longer inhabited, as if they never lived there: (11:94-95) Another black page of history was turned after God's word came to pass against those who rejected His warnings.

The Mission of Jethro

Chapter 29: The 85th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And to Midian, their brother Jethro. He said: O my folk! Worship God and hope for the Last Day and do not mischief in and on the earth as ones who make corruption.* (29:36)

And they denied him. So the quaking of the earth took them and it came to be in the morning in their abodes, ones who are fallen prostrate. (29:37)

Commentary°

The [sign] then gives brief references to different communities of unbelievers and the ends they suffered, starting with Shuayb's people. (29:36-29:37)

In this reference to the Prophet Shuayb we see the unity of the divine message and the essence of faith. (Verse 36) Worshipping God alone is the basic rule of faith. Looking forward to the Day of Judgment would ensure that they stopped their evil ways. For example, they deliberately defrauded people when they measured or weighed for them in business. They also looted from those who passed through their lands, deprived them of what they had, and generally spread corruption, behaving arrogantly.

Furthermore, they took a stand against their prophet, accusing him of lying; therefore, God destroyed them. He brought into force His law of punishing unbelievers who deny their messengers. (Verse 37) We mentioned previously the earthquake that shook their land after a great blast left them stunned in their homes, unable to stir. Thus they were left lifeless in fitting requital for their repeated terrorization of others.

The Companions of the Wood

The Companions of the Wood Deny Their Messenger

Chapter 50: The 34th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *The folk of Noah denied what came before them,*
and the Companions of the Rass and Thamud, (50:12)
and Ad and Pharaoh and the brothers of Lot, (50:13)
and the Companions of the Wood and the folk of Tubba.
Everyone denied the Messengers,
so My threat was realized. (50:14)
Were We wearied by the first creation?
Nay! They are perplexed about a new creation. (50:15)

Commentary°

The Companions of the Wood signifies a well over which there is no built wall, and the dales signifies an area thick with trees. The people of the wooded dales most probably refer to Jethro's (Shuayb's) people. We have no information about them other than this reference here and a similar one in Chapter 25 (25:38). The same applies to the people of Tubba, a title used by the Yemeni kings of the Himyar dynasty. The other peoples mentioned in this short passage are known to anyone who reads the Quran.

The purpose of this quick reference to these peoples is certainly not to give any detailed information about them. It is only a reminder of the fate of earlier disbelieving communities. What is worth noting is that the sign mentions that each denied 'God's messengers', in the plural. This emphasizes the unity of the divine message as all messengers preached the same faith. Thus, whoever denies anyone of Gods messengers actually denies them all, because he rejects the same message delivered by them all. Gods' messengers are brothers forming one community. They are like a tree with roots stretching far back into time. Each branch of that tree projects all its essential qualities, giving an image of the whole. Therefore, whoever cuts a branch actually cuts the tree and all its branches. Therefore, God's warnings came true and those communities suffered the fates known to listeners.

The Companions of the Wood

Chapter 38: The 38th Chapter Revealed

and Thamud and a folk of Lot and the Companions of the Wood.
Those were the confederates. (38:13)

All of them denied the Messengers
so My repayment was realized. (38:14)

Jethro's Mission to the Companions of the Wood

Chapter 26: The 47th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *The Companions of the Wood*
denied the ones who are sent. (26:176)
When Shuayb said to them:
Will you not be God-conscious? (26:177)
Truly, I am a trustworthy Messenger to you (26:178)
so be God-conscious and obey me. (26:179)
And I ask you not for any compensation for it.
My compensation is only from the Lord of the worlds. (26:180)
Live up to the full measure
and be not of the ones who cause loss to others by fraud. (26:181)
And weigh with a straight scale (26:182)
and diminish not to humanity their things
nor do mischief in or on the earth
as ones who make corruption. (26:183)
And be God-conscious of Him Who created you
and the array of the ancient ones. (26:184)
They said: You are only ones
against whom a spell is cast. (26:185)
And you are nothing but a mortal like us.
And, truly, we think you to be among the ones who lie. (26:186)
So cause pieces of heaven to drop on us,
if you had been among the ones who are sincere. (26:187)
He said: My Lord is greater in knowledge
of what you do. (26:188)
But they denied him.
So took them the punishment on the overshadowing day.
Truly, that had been the punishment
of a tremendous Day! (26:189)
Truly, in this is a sign.
Yet most of them had not been ones who believe. (26:190)
And, truly, your Lord, He is, certainly,
The Almighty, The Compassionate. (26:191)

Commentary°

This passage (26:176-26:178) tells the story of the Prophet Jethro (Shuayb). It is told here for the lessons involved in all the stories given in this chapter. The dwellers of the 'wooded dales' were

most probably the people of Midian. It seems that Midian was close to this wooded land, thick with trees, as the Quranic description implies. Midian lies close to the Gulf of Aqaba, in the area between the Hijaz province of Saudi Arabia and Palestine. Jethro (Shuayb) began in the same way as other prophets calling on people, explaining to them the basic essentials of faith, and making it clear that he sought no gain in return for his advocacy. He then spoke to them about the ills that plagued their own society.

The Companions of Midian

Chapter 11: The 52nd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And We sent to Midian their brother Jethro.*
He said: O my folk! Worship God. You have no god other than He.
And reduce not the measuring vessel and balance.
Truly, I consider you as good. And, truly, I fear for you
the punishment of an Enclosing Day. (11:84)
And O my folk! Live up to the measuring vessel
and balance in equity. And diminish not of humanity their things.
And do no mischief in and on the earth
as ones who make corruption. (11:85)
God's abiding wisdom is best for you
if you had been ones who believe.
And I am not a Guardian over you. (11:86)
*They said: O Shuayb! Is it that **your** formal prayer*
*commands **you** that we leave what our fathers worship*
or that we accomplish not with our possibilities whatever we will?
*Truly, **you** are the forbearing, the well-intentioned.* (11:87
He said: O my folk! Considered you that I had bee
with a clear portent from my Lora.
He provided me fairer provision from Himself.
And I want not to go against you in what I prohibit you.
I want only making things right so far as I was able.
And my success is not but from God.
In Him I put my trust and to Him I am penitent. (11:88)
And O my folk! Let not your breach with me drive you into being
lit on by the like of what lit on a folk of Noah or a folk of Hud
or a folk of Salih. And a folk of Lot are not far from you. (11:89)
And ask for forgiveness from your Lord.
Again, repent to Him.
Truly, my Lord is Compassionate, Loving. (11:90)
They said: O Jethro! We understand not much
*of what **you** say*
*And, truly, we see **you** weak among us.*
*If it had not been for **your** extended family,*
*we would have stoned **you***
*And **you** are not mighty against us.* (11:91)
He said: O my folk! Is my extended family mightier to you
than God whom you took to yourselves to disregard?
Truly, my Lord is One Who Encloses whatever you do. (11:92)
O my folk! Act according to your ability
and, truly, I am one who acts.
You will know to whom approaches a punishment

covering him with shame and who, he is one who lies.
And be on the watch! Truly, I am watching with you. (11:93)
And Our command drew near. We delivered Jethro
and those who believed with him by a mercy from Us.
And the Cry took those who did wrong.
It came to be in the morning in their abodes
ones who are fallen prostrate, (11:94)
as if they had not dwelled in them.
Away with the Midian just as Thamud was done away. (11:95)

Commentary°

Submission to God alone (11:84) is the first article of faith as well as the first rule of life and the first principle of law and human transactions. It is the principle without which faith, worship or human dealings cannot take their proper shape.

The main issue here is honesty and justice, which comes second only to the issue of faith and submission to God. (11:84-11:86) In other words, it is the issue of the law that governs business dealings on the basis of faith. The people of Midian, whose country was an enclave of land lying between Hijaz and Syria, used to give short measure and weight, thus wronging other people in respect of what was rightfully theirs. That is, they used to give other people less than the value of their goods. Their misconduct reflected badly on their integrity and honor and showed that they were far from clean both externally and at heart. Their geographical position meant that they were able to control the trade route of the caravans moving between the north and the south of Arabia. This enabled them to dictate unfair terms on other peoples" trade.

When business dealings and morality have such a solid basis, they are not influenced by immediate or material interests or by differing environments with different factors and considerations. Hence, rules of morality and those that govern human dealings are not subject to whether people are nomadic, agrarian or industrialized. Such changeable factors lose their influence on the moral concepts of society or the moral values that govern business transactions when the basis of legislation for all spheres of life is divine law. Then the essential basis of morality is to seek God's pleasure, hoping to win His reward and avoid His punishment. All that is advanced by human-made theories and doctrines about morality being the product of the economic situation and the social conditions prevailing in a particular society become meaningless in the light of Islamic moral theory.

God has given you ample provision for your sustenance, so you have no need to indulge in vile practices to add to your riches. (Verse

84) You will not become poor if you give full measure and weight and give people what is rightfully theirs. Your happy state is indeed threatened by your cheating practices and your unlawful earnings. (11:84) This may come on the Day of Judgment, or it may indeed occur in this life when your cheating practices yield their bitter fruits and rebound on your society and your trade. People will then suffer injustice brought about by some of them against others.

Shuayb repeats his advice positively after having expressed it in the form of a prohibition. (11:85)

To give full measure and weight is more expressive than not falling short on both of them. It is closer to giving others more than their due. Different forms of expression have different connotations and leave different effects. The effect of giving full measure and full weight is much more kindly than that of not falling short.

This is much more general (11:85) than what is valued according to measure and weight. It stresses the fair evaluation of everything which belongs to others, whether this evaluation is in weight, measure, price or otherwise. It also includes material as well as moral evaluations. It may be said to further encompass actions and personal qualities. The Arabic term used here includes both the material and the abstract.

When people suffer maltreatment in respect of what rightfully belongs to them, this gives rise to bitterness, grudges and despair. Such feelings can only ruin society and destroy social links as they adversely affect consciences and hearts. They leave no room for anything good in life.

(11:85) They must not willingly seek to spread corruption because it rebounds on them. Instead, their hearts should awaken to something far better and far more rewarding than their stained earnings. (11:86) What is with God is far better and lasts much longer. At the outset, Shuayb called on his people to worship God alone. He reminds them of this here, when he mentions their lasting reward that they will receive from God if they respond to his call, and follow his advice in their business dealings. After all, his advice is part of that faith.

Having called on them to believe in God alone, he leaves them to Him, declaring that he cannot influence their destiny, and is not their guardian. He is not responsible for preventing them from error and is not answerable for their erroneous practices, should they choose to indulge in them. His task is to convey his message to them, which he has done. (11:86) This expression awakens the addressees to the gravity of the matter and to their heavy responsibility. It puts them face to face with what awaits them in the end, when they will

have no guardian or intermediary.

The people of Midian were hardened in their corrupt practices. Their reply was sarcastic. Every word of it smacked of sarcasm. Yet it also indicated their ignorance and mulish obstinacy. (11:87) They did not realize, nor wanted to realize, that prayers are required by faith, as a manifestation of true submission to God. Faith cannot be established without the recognition of God's oneness and the renunciation of everything else they or their forefathers worshipped. Likewise, it cannot be established unless God's legislation in matters of trade and finance, as well as in all spheres of life, are implemented. All these are a complete whole, and faith cannot be separated from prayers or legislation which caters for all aspects of human life.

The people of Midian, who had such an ill-conceived idea of the connection between faith and worship, and between the two and business transactions lived a long time ago. But rather than denounce their attitude at length we should remind ourselves that people today stick to certain concepts which are not much different from those of Shuayb's people. The world of jahiliyyah which we see around us today is not much better or more intelligent than the earlier one. The sort of ascription of Godhead to other beings alongside God, which was practiced by Shuayb's people, is still practiced today by most of mankind, including those who claim to be Jews, Christians, or Muslims. All try to establish a barrier separating faith and worship on the one hand and law and business transactions on the other. They claim that faith and worship belong to God and should be conducted according to His instructions, while the law and business do not concern Him. These should be conducted according to the bidding of some other authority. This is indeed the essence of attributing partners to God.

The people of Midian were sarcastic when they addressed their Prophet Shuayb, just as certain people today resort to sarcasm when they speak of those who advocate submission to God alone in all affairs. They said to Shuayb. (11:87) They obviously meant the opposite. To them, wisdom and right meant that they should follow in their fathers" footsteps and worship the same gods they worshipped. It also meant that they should separate worship from business. The same ideas are advocated by present-day intellectuals who do not hide their sarcasm when they speak of the advocates of Islam and describe them as reactionary.

Shuayb, fully confident of the truth of his message, and aware of his people's ignorance and short-sightedness, does not let their sarcasm affect him. On the contrary, he seeks to inform them politely that he takes his stand on clear evidence from his Lord, which he

feels in his innermost heart. He explains to them that he is fully confident of the truth of what he advocates because his knowledge far exceeds theirs. When he calls on them to stick to honest dealings, the effects of such honesty also apply to him since he is a businessman. He is after no personal gain which he seeks to realize for himself. He does not intend to do behind their backs what he has forbidden them so that he enjoys a market free from competition. His call is one of reform which includes himself. The path he enjoins them to follow will not cause them any losses, as they mistakenly think.

He said: Think, my people! If I take my stand on a clear evidence from my Lord and He has provided me with goodly sustenance which He alone can give? I have no desire to do, in opposition to you, what I ask you not to do. All that I desire is to set things to rights in so far as it lies within my power. My success depends on God alone. In Him have I placed my trust, and to Him I always turn." (11:88)

Shuayb addresses them in a friendly and appealing way, reminding them of his close links with them. (Verse 88) I am after no personal gain that I may realize by so doing. (11:88)

It is, then, the general reform of society that Shuayb is after. It is a reform that brings benefit to every individual and every community. Some may think that to adhere to moral values and implement the divine law may make them lose some chances that may be open to them, or lose some gain that they would otherwise achieve. But implementing the divine law can only make them lose evil gains and wicked opportunities. It compensates them with goodly gains and lawful provisions. It also establishes a society that is characterized by the co-operation of its individuals. It is a society that is free from grudges, treachery and selfish quarrels.

He alone can grant me success, as He knows my intentions and the sincerity of my efforts. (11:88) From Him alone I seek help to overcome the difficulties that may beset me and to Him alone I submit my work and efforts.

Shuayb then tries another way of reminding them of the truth. He reminds them of the doom that befell the peoples of Noah, Hud, Salih and Lot. This may open their hardened hearts in a way which rational, cool and well-argued reminders may not. (11:89)

He tells them that they must not let their opposition to him harden their attitude of blind rejection. He says to them plainly that he fears that they may bring upon themselves a doom that is not unlike that which befell earlier communities. He reminds them especially of the people of Lot who lived close by and who had recently

been destroyed.

When he has raised this prospect before them he then opens the doors to forgiveness and repentance. He uses the kindest and gentlest terms in order to assure them of God's mercy and compassion. (11:90)

Thus Shuayb tries all methods of admonition and remonstration in the hope that his people's hearts will open up and respond to the truth. They, however, are so hardened in their erring ways and in their misconceptions of values and motives that their response remains negative. We have seen an example of their response in their mocking at Shuayb and his prayer.

(11:91) The people of Midian made it clear to Shuayb that they were fed up with him and with his message. They did not want to know anything about the truth he was presenting and did not care for anything which differed with their attitude to life or with their practices. Thus, in their view, only physical strength mattered. Plain truth was of no real significance, regardless of the strength of its argument, if it was not supported by physical power. What restrained them from doing so was the fact that they reckoned with the power of Shuayb's clan and family who were supposed to come to his defense. They did not reckon with the power of God who would not leave His messenger to the mercy of His enemies. They had no respect for him as a noble person, nor for his own strength. They only had to consider what his clan might do if anything happened to him.

When people are devoid of proper faith, sound values and noble ideals, they care nothing for anything beyond their immediate interests or their material well-being. To them, any good cause or apparent truth has no sanctity whatsoever. They do not hesitate to assault the advocates of God's cause if these have no apparent power to protect them.

Shuayb was angry with his people for their arrogance towards God. He made it clear that he did not derive his power from his clan or family. He confronted them with their misjudgment of the true powers which can influence things in the universe, and pointed out to them that their insolence would not benefit them with God, aware as He always is of people's actions. Shuayb said his last word and parted ways with his people on the basis that there was no common ground of faith between them. He warned them against the suffering that befell all people who adopted their attitude and then left them to their destiny.

(11:92) Any group of people, strong and powerful as they may be, are, after all, human, subject to God's power. Hence, they are weak. How can you then give such a group of human beings more

importance than you give to God? How can you fear them more than you fear Him? You have turned your backs on Him. This is an image of physical rejection that heightens the enormity of their error. They turn their backs on God who has created them and who has given them all the goods they enjoy in this life. Their attitude is one of ingratitude and insolence as much as it is one of rejection of faith.

The Arabic expression used here gives an image of complete and perfect knowledge, as well as complete and overall power. Angry at his people's impudence towards God, Shuayb takes the proper attitude of a true believer. He does not find any gratification or reassurance in the fact that his own family and clan enjoyed such respect and power that afforded him protection from possible assault. This is evidence of true faith.

Shuayb's anger and his disavowal of any protection given him by anyone other than God prompt him to challenge his people and then disassociate himself from them totally. (11:93) He challenges them to do what they can, to go along their way to the end. He will work according to his method and program. Time will tell who will suffer and who will prosper. The way he throws down his challenge and invites them to watch for the outcome tells of his absolute trust in God.

The curtains fall here to open up again when the issue is finally resolved. We see the people of Midian prostrate, lifeless in their homes, after having been overtaken by a dreadful cry, similar to that which overwhelmed the Thamud, Salih's people. There is great similarity between what happened to both peoples. In both cases, their houses were no longer inhabited, as if they never lived there: (11:94-95) Another black page of history was turned after God's word came to pass against those who rejected His warnings.

The Companions of Midian

Chapter 22: The 103rd Chapter Revealed

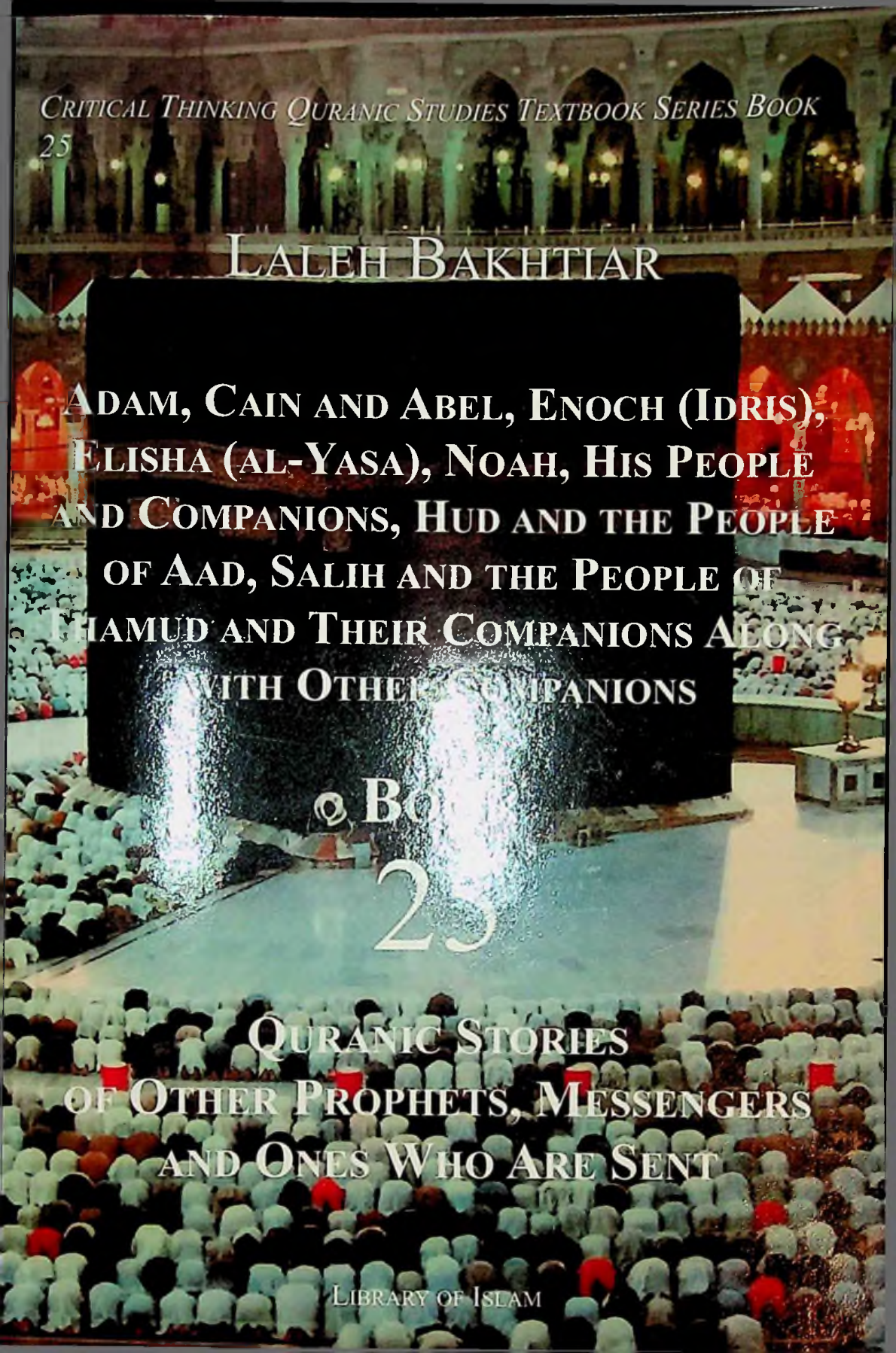
and the companions of Midian.
And Moses was denied, but I granted indulgence
to the ones who are ungrateful.
Again, I took them and how had been My disapproval! (22:44)

The Companions of Midian

Chapter 9: The 113th Chapter Revealed

Approaches them not the tidings of those before them—
the folk of Noah and of Ad and of Thamud,
and of a folk of Abraham, and of the Companions of Midian,

and that which are cities overthrown?
Their Messengers approached them with the clear portents. So it had
not been God who did wrong to them,
rather, they had been doing wrong to themselves. (9:70)


Critical Thinking Quranic Studies Textbook Series Book 25
Laleh Bakhtiar
Adam, Cain and Abel, Enoch (Idris), Elisha (al-Yasa), Noah, His People and Companions, Hud and the People of Aad, Salih and the People of Thamud and Their Companions Along with Other Companions
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Library of Islam

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Preface

Explanation of the Critical Thinking Quranic Studies Textbook Series

There are thirty books in this series. Books entitled *Book Year 1* to *Book Year 24* consist of one book for each year of the revelation. Books 25-28 are devoted to the Quranic stories of all other Prophets and Messengers in order of their dates. *Book 25: Adam, Cain and Abel, Enoch (Idris), Noah, Hud and the People of Aad; Saleh and the People of Thamud; Book 26: Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Lot, Jacob (Israel), Joseph and Job; Book 27: Moses, Aaron, Children of Jacob (Israel), Jethro (Shuayb), Joshua, Khidr and Samuel; Book 28: David, Solomon, Elijah (Ilyas), Elisha (Alyasa), Jonah (Younis), Ezekiel (Dhul Kifl), Ezra (Uzayr), Dhul Qarnayn (Cyrus the Great or Alexander the Great), Luqman, Zechariah, John the Baptist (Yahya), Mary and Jesus.* The last two are: *Book 29: The Life of Prophet Muhammad from Birth to the Revelation* and *Book 30: Teacher's Manual.* The last, *Book 30,* has been prepared for the teacher's Lesson Plans.

Sources

The sources for the history include the works of Ibn Ishaq, Ibn Hashim, Waqidi, Ibn Sad and commentaries by Ibn Abbas, Jalalayn, Tustari and Sayyid Qutb. The sources for the commentaries of Ibn Abbas, Jalalayn and Tustari have been used with the permission of the publisher, the Royal Institute of Ahl al-Bayt in Jordan. They are available on their website www.altafsir.com.

The inclusion of excerpted commentaries (tafsir) by Sayyid Qutb's In the Shade of the Quran (available online) in this Critical Thinking Quranic Studies Textbook Series is because Sayyid Qutb is considered by some extremist groups as their intellectual source. By including excerpts from his eighteen volume Quranic commentary, extremists cannot disclaim the importance of learning critical thinking as this series is to help young adults learn HOW to think using self-realization (tahqiq) and critical thinking (furqan) skills taught by the Quran. This in order to arm young adults with the ability to choose reason over any irrational extremist ideology that is presented to them.

Terminology

All Quranic signs are translations from *The Sublime Quran.* For the Muslim, the Quran is the Word (Logos) of God. It is this Word of God that has inspired artists, artisans, poets, philosophers and writers, those who had been the exponents of Islamic culture and civilization for almost 1500 years. Yesterday and today's Muslim wants to know more about each Word that God chose for His revelation through the Quran. This realization, in turn, prompted the translation of The Sublime Quran, an attempt to give the sense of unity within the revelation to a non-Arabic speaking reader.

There are several points to note about the terminology used in the translation of the Quranic text and the commentaries.

1. The blessed Prophet did not bring a new religion; he came to confirm what was right in the messages of the previous Prophets. Does this translation speak to the universality of the Quran? The Quran tells the Prophet, the mercy to all of humanity, to speak to people in their own language. Following his example, in addition to the translation being unbounded by time, in several sensitive cases, the word chosen to translate an Arabic word is also of a universal or inclusive rather than a particular or exclusive nature. This adds to the broadening of the perspective and scope of the Quran so that it becomes inclusive rather than exclusive to one particular group of people. In other words, in this way a larger audience can relate to its message.

2. The Quran refers to itself (the Quran) from the very beginning of the revelation (68:35).

3 Most English translations of the Quran refer to the "Children of Israel." The word "Israel" when used in the Quran refers to Jacob, the patriarch of the children who followed him such as Joseph. Therefore, it should be the "Children of Jacob" as it appears in these texts.

5. The word "*kufr*" and "*kafir*" have been translated here as "ingratitude" and "ungrateful" where the context allows. This is the first meaning of the word and many of us in our lifetime have met Muslims who are "ungrateful." It is the ungrateful Muslims who practice intolerance by declaring anyone who says: Peace be upon you (as-salam alaykum) as a non-believer (with what is called *takfir*). In those cases, it would not be suitable to call them "unbelievers" or "infidels," but it is clearly appropriate to refer to them as being "ungrateful" and this would include the early Quraysh, ungrateful for God's revelation and prophethood of Muhammad, who ridiculed the Prophet and fought against the Quranic message of love, forgiveness and peace.

6. Yet another example of the use of inclusive language in an attempt to speak to people in their own language, is the use of God instead of Allah. Many English speaking Muslims, as well as many of the English translations of the Quran to date, use Allah when speaking English instead of God. The intention on the part of the speaker is to maintain a sense of piety. They feel that using Allah in English moves them in that direction. Many even claim that the word Allah cannot be translated.

However well-intentioned a person may be, when speaking English, the use of the word Allah instead of God, first of all, does not follow the Quranic verse that tells the Prophet to speak to people in their own language. Subsequently, it does not follow the Sunnah of the Prophet who did speak to people in their own language.

In addition, it creates a divide between Muslims who use the word and the English speaking people of various faiths to whom they are speaking. In effect, it creates the illusion that there is more than One God—Allah and God.

The response of the English speaking person of another faith is to say: I do not understand your religion; you have a different God than I do and you call Him Allah.

It needs to be clearly explained to English speaking Muslims that, unlike what they may feel, they do not have a monopoly on the word Allah. Arabic speaking Christians and Arabic speaking Jews also refer to God as Allah. The Old Testament and New Testament, when translated into Arabic, use Allah for God.

English speaking Muslims, therefore, need to recall the message of the Quran that God is One (tawhid). In addition, the Prophet did not bring a new religion but confirmed what was correct in the messages of previous Prophets, namely, that God is One. Finally, they need to follow the example of the Prophet, as the Quran says he is the model or example to be followed, by speaking to people in their own language.

7. The Arabic language, much like old English, has the second person singular (masculine: anta (where the verb ends in ka). The English equivalent is the subject: "thou" or the object: "thee" or the possessive: "thy." As these are no longer in common usage in English, wherever the original Arabic uses one of these terms, the word "**you**" or "**your**" appear in bold font so that the reader knows the original was the second person singular. When the Quran is speaking directly to the Prophet, it uses the pronoun "thee" or "thou" so it is an important distinction to make.

Using you (second person plural) is done to help English speaking readers, recognizing that using the second person plural pronoun you (masculine: antum where the verb ends in masculine: kum) for God is to intimate that God is plural, the only sin in the Quran that is unforgivable. By putting the pronoun **you** in bold font indicates the true intention.

8. For the Arabic word "*ayah*," the English word used in these texts is "sign" rather than the Biblical term, "verse."

9. Several of the signs were abrogated over time. However the indication of a sign being abrogated was done after the complete revelation of the Quran. Whether or not a sign was later abrogated does not change the fact that the first Muslims who listened to the Quran, heard the signs that may have later been said to have been abrogated and that a hafez of the Quran recites all the signs as they appear in the original Arabic revealed to the Prophet. Whatever signs scholars later determined to be abrogated are still part of the Quran and, therefore, are not relevant to learning to be a Quranic critical thinker, learning HOW to think.

10. The first number that appears when the Quranic Chapters begin refers to the chapter number in the chronological order of the revelation so that Quranic Chapter 110 which was the last to be revealed is number 114 in the chronological order.

11. It is to be noted that whenever the name of Muhammad, Prophet Muham-

mad or the Prophet are used, one may say a silent prayer of blessings for him.

12. All the signs in the text are in chronological order.

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Adam

By the middle Meccan period of the revelation (ca. 615-618 CE), the early Muslims hear the story of Adam, the first human being. The Quran does not refer to him as a Prophet, a Messenger nor as One Who is Sent. It does say, however, that there will be Prophets among his offspring and for that reason we have included him here. We will study the signs regarding Adam, as well as that of the rest of the Prophets, Messengers and Ones Who are Sent through the Quranic signs in chronological order so we have a sense of how the Quran taught the early Muslims about them.

The Great Tidings

Chapter 38: The 38th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Your Lord said to the angels:*
Truly, I am one who is Creator of a mortal from clay. (38:71)
So when I shaped him and breathed into him My Spirit,
then, fall to him, ones who prostrate themselves. (38:72)
So the angels prostrated themselves,
one and all, altogether (38:73)
but Iblis. He grew arrogant
and had been among the ones who are ungrateful. (38:74)
He said: O Iblis! What prevented you from prostrating thyself
to what I created with My two hands?
Had you grown arrogant?
Or had you been among the ones who exalt themselves? (38:75)
Iblis said: I am better than he. You had created me from fire while
You had created him from clay. (38:76)
He said: Then, go you forth from here
for, truly, you are accursed. (38:77)
And, truly, on you is My curse until the Day of Judgment. (38:78)
Iblis said: My Lord! Then, give me respite
until the Day to be raised up. (38:79)
He said: Truly, you are among the ones
who are given respite (38:80)
until the Day of the known time. (38:81)
Iblis said: By Your Great Glory,
then, I will certainly lead them one and all into error, (38:82)
but Your devoted servants among them. (38:83)
He said: This is The Truth and The Truth I say (38:84)
that I will fill hell with you and with one
and all of whoever heeded you. (38:85)

Commentary°

Mention, when your Lord said to the angels, *Truly, I am one who is Creator of a mortal from clay*, and this was Adam. (38:71) So when I have proportioned him, completed him, and breathed in him, when I have caused to flow therein, My Spirit, so that he becomes a living being—the addition of 'the Spirit' to Adam is an honor for him; the 'Spirit' is a subtle body that gives life to a human being by permeating him—then fall down in prostration before him!— a prostration of salutation that is actually a bow. *So when I shaped him and breathed into him My Spirit, then, fall to him, ones who prostrate themselves.* (38:72) *So the angels prostrated themselves, one and all, altogether* (38:73) except Iblis, the father of the jinn, who was among the audience of angels; he was disdainful and he was one of the disbelievers, according to God's knowledge, exalted be He.

The Creation of Adam and the Defiance of Satan

Chapter 7: the 39th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We created you.*
Again, We formed you.
Again, We said to the angels: Prostrate yourselves before Adam!
Then, they prostrated themselves, but Iblis.
He would not be of the ones who prostrate themselves. (7:11)
He said: What prevented you
from prostrating yourself when I commanded you?
Satan said: I am better than he.
You had created me of fire
and You had created him of clay. (7:12)
He said: So get you down from this!
It will not be for you to increase in pride in it.
Then, you go forth.
Truly, you are of the ones who are disgraced. (7:13)
Satan said: Give me respite
until the Day they are raised up. (7:14)
He said: Truly, you are
among the ones who are given respite. (7:15)
Satan said: Because You had led me into error, certainly, I will sit in ambush for them on Your path, one that is straight. (7:16)
Again, I will approach them from between the front of them and from behind them and from their right and from their left.
And You will not find many of them ones who are thankful. (7:17)
He said: Go you forth from this—one who is scorned,
one who is rejected.

Whoever heeded you among them, I will, certainly,
fill hell with you, one and all. (7:18)
And: O Adam! Inhabit you and your spouse the Garden
and both eat from where you both willed,
but neither of you come near this tree
or you both will be of the ones who are unjust. (7:19)
And Satan whispered evil to them both to show them both
what was kept secret from them both—their intimate parts.
And he said: The Lord of both of you prohibited
you both from this tree so that neither of you be angels
nor be ones who will dwell forever. (7:20)
And he swore an oath to them both
that I am the one who gives advice to both of you. (7:21)
Then, he led both of them on to delusion.
Then, when they both experienced of the tree,
the intimate parts of both showed to both themselves
and both of them took to doing stitching together
over both from the leaves of the Garden.
And the Lord of both of them proclaimed to them:
Prohibited I not both of you from that tree?
And said I not to both of you:
Truly, Satan is a clear enemy of you both. (7:22)
They both said: Our Lord! We did wrong to ourselves.
And if You will not forgive us and have mercy on us,
we will, certainly, be among the ones who are losers. (7:23)
He said: Get you down, some of you an enemy to some other.
And for you on the earth an appointed time
and enjoyment for awhile. (7:24)
He said: You will live in it and you will die in it
and from it you will be brought out. (7:25)

Commentary°

Iblis/Satan belongs to a different type of creation, separate from the angels. He is created out of fire while they are created out of light. They do not disobey God, whatever His command may be. He, on the other hand, disobeyed God, rejecting His command. For certain, then, he is not, and never was, one of the angels. That we have here a form of exception, more strongly pronounced in the Arabic text, refers to what is called in Arabic linguistics 'inconsequential exception'. It is acceptable to say in Arabic: The Joneses have come except for Ahmad, when you know that Ahmad does not belong to the Jones family, but is always with them. Now since the order stated here has

been issued to the angels, how could it apply to Iblis? This is clear proof that Iblis was given the same command. He might have been included in the command given to the angels, if he was with them at the time, or perhaps a separate order was issued to him. However, this is not mentioned here and this shows that he is of a far lesser position than the angels. Furthermore, the texts we have, and Satan's own behavior, all demonstrate that he was not one of the angels.

Offspring of Adam Given Prophethood

Chapter 19: The 44th Chapter Revealed

Madinah 622: *Those are those to whom God was gracious*
from among the Prophets of the offspring of Adam
and whomever We carried with Noah
and of the offspring of Abraham and Israel, Jacob,
from among whomever We guided and elected.
When are recounted to them the signs of the Merciful
they fell down, crying, ones who prostrate themselves. (19:58)

Commentary°

These are they those whom I mentioned: Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Jesus, Idris and all the prophets unto whom God showed favor from among the prophets God favored them with prophethood, the message and Islam, of the seed of Adam and of those whom We carried in the ship with Noah the offspring of Noah, and of the seed of Abraham, Ishmael and Isaac and Jacob (Israel) and of the offspring of Jacob: Joseph and his brothers, and from among those whom We guided those whom We favor.

Clearly the Prophets among the offspring of Adam, and Noah and the ofspring of Abraham and Jacob were developing their perspectives by God's guidance to them.

Angels Commanded to Prostrate Themselves Before Adam

Chapter 20: The 45th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We made a compact*
with Adam before. (20:115)
Then, he forgot and We find no constancy in him.
And when We said to the angels: Prostrate yourselves to Adam!
They prostrated themselves, but Iblis who refused. (20:116)
*Then, We said: O Adam! Truly, this is an enemy to **you***
*and to **your** spouse, so let him not drive you*
both out from the Garden

*so that **you** would be in despair.* (20:117)
*Truly, it is not for **you** that **you** hunger in it*
nor to be naked. (20:118)
*And, truly, **you** will not thirst in it*
nor suffer the heat of the sun. (20:119)
Then, Satan whispered evil to him.
*He said: O Adam! Will I point **you** to the Tree of Infinity*
and a dominion that will not decay? (20:120)
Then, they both ate from that so the intimate parts
of both showed to both themselves.
Both of them took to doing stitching together
over both from the leaves of the Garden.
And Adam rebelled against his Lord and he erred. (20:121)
Again, his Lord elected him.
Then, He turned in forgiveness to him and guided him. (20:122)
He said: Get you both down from here altogether,
some of you an enemy to some others.
Then, if guidance approaches you from Me,
then, whoever followed My Guidance,
neither will he go astray, nor will he be in despair. (20:123)
And whoever turned aside from My Remembrance,
then, truly, for him is a livelihood of narrowness.
And We will assemble him
on the Day of Resurrection unseeing. (20:124)

Commentary°

Adam's forgetting of his commitment is referred to at the outset. Moreover, the story is given in a chapter that reveals many aspects of God's grace bestowed on those chosen servants whom He places under His care. Therefore, in this story the point is made that God chose Adam, accepted his repentance and provided him with guidance.

God's covenant with Adam and his wife was that they could eat of all the fruits in the Garden except for one tree that represented the prohibition necessary to strengthen willpower, assert one's personality and liberate oneself of the oppressive pressure of desire. All this is necessary to give the human soul the freedom to do without its supposed needs, so that it is not enslaved by desire. This is indeed the true measure of human excellence. Whenever the human will weakens under the pressure of desire, he sinks closer to the level of animals.

Therefore, God so tested the human being initially in order to

prepare him for his role of building human life on earth. Thus the test is seen to be part of God's grace that He bestows on the human being in abundance: his power to resist temptation is alerted and enhanced. His eyes are opened to the struggle awaiting him between the pleasures raised before him by Satan and his will to honor his commitment to God. The results of this first test are made public: He forgot it [i.e. his commitment], and We found him lacking in constancy or firmness of purpose. The result is declared before the details of the test have been given.

This episode [of the angels being commanded to prostrate before Adam] of the story is given in very general terms, without the details given in other chapters. The general context here is one of mercy, care and blessings. Therefore, these aspects are brought forth very quickly.

We see how God takes care to alert Adam to the wicked designs employed by his enemy, warning him against Satan's treachery, after he disobeyed God's command to prostrate himself before Adam. The warning is very precise, showing the inevitable result of listening to Satan and his promptings. Once Adam and his wife are thrown out of heaven, all they will have is affliction: hard labor, going astray, worry, indecision, endless waiting, agony, deprivation, etc. As long as they are in Paradise, they are immune to all affliction. All that the human being needs is available in plenty in Paradise, which means that a person should ensure he stays there. We note here how hunger and nakedness are shown to be parallel to thirst and intense heat. These four represent the human being's initial concerns as he tries to find food, clothing, drink and shade.

Adam however was without experience. Moreover, he was burdened by weakness, such as his desire for survival and his other desire to feel himself powerful. It was through these weaknesses that Satan was able to tempt him.

We see here how Satan touches Adam's raw nerve. Human life and power are limited. Therefore, he longs for survival and lasting power. These two desires provided Satan with suitable openings. As we have said, Adam had all human weaknesses planted in him for a definite purpose. Therefore, he forgot his commitment and transgressed the permitted limits.

It appears that what Adam and his wife saw were their genitals, which had thus far been covered. This is the more likely explanation, since they started to cover themselves again, piecing together leaves from the trees in heaven. On the other hand, the expression may mean

that their action aroused their sexual desire.

It may be that the tree was forbidden to Adam and his wife because its fruits could awaken their sexual desire. Perhaps it was intended to leave this desire dormant for a time. It could be, on the other hand, that their forgetting of their commitment to God and their disobedience of His orders resulted in a weakening of their willpower and a break of their bond with the Lord Creator, giving way to the emergence of sexual and reproductive desires. It is only in this way that human beings can extend their life beyond their own term. All these are possible explanations for the association between their eating of the forbidden tree and their becoming aware of their nakedness. The Quran does not say, "their shameful parts became visible"; rather, these parts became visible "to them." This suggests that these parts were screened from them and then became exposed through their own inner feelings.

Perhaps the clothing that Satan removed was not physical, but rather, a protective feeling of innocence, purity and closeness to God. These are mere hypotheses that we neither emphasize nor give weight to. We state them only to make the first human experience with temptation clearer.

But God extended His grace to Adam and his wife after he had disobeyed Him. This was only the first experience. Realizing the enormity of his error, Adam and Eve both repented and sought God's forgiveness, but this is not mentioned here in order to leave God's grace to be seen most clearly.

Drawing the Lines of Battle

The order was then given to the two combatants to descend to earth, which would be the battleground in this long-lasting war. Thus, the enmity was declared the whole world over. This means that there is no excuse for Adam and his progeny. None can claim to have been taken unawares. Everyone knows the score and the un-abating hostility. The whole universe is aware of it.

Along with this declaration which resounded throughout the heavens and the earth, and which was witnessed by all the angels, God has willed, out of His grace, to send His messengers bringing guidance to humanity, before He punishes them for their sins. Thus, at the same time He alerts His servants to this enmity between Adam and Satan, He announces to them that He will provide them with guidance. He will then give them their reward according to whether they follow His guidance or reject it:

When guidance shall come to you from Me, he who follows My

guidance will not go astray, nor will he suffer misery; but he who turns away from My message shall have a straitened lift and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Resurrection. He will say: Lord, he why have You raised me up blind, while I was endowed with sight? God will reply: Thus it is: Our revelations were brought to you, but you were oblivious to them.

When human life severs its links with God, depriving itself of His abundant grace, it becomes straitened, even though it may be materially affluent. It is a type of stress attendant on being isolated from God and the reassurance of His mercy. It is a stress that demonstrates itself in worry, doubt and confusion; holding tight to what one owns and fearing unexpected loss; coveting all manner of comfort and pleasure; nurturing aspirations and ambitions, etc. People do not feel true reassurance except when they place their trust in God, holding tight to their bond with Him. The reassurance generated by faith in God adds much to life's dimensions in length, breadth, depth and expanse. Without such reassurance, life is nothing but a continuous misery and is far harder than what man suffers through poverty and deprivation. This is the same type of going astray as that which man went through in the life of this world. It comes by way of recompense for his turning away from God's message in this first life.

Satan's Pride Against the Human Being

Chapter 17: The 50th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And mention when We said to the angels:*
Prostrate yourselves to Adam!
so they prostrated themselves, but Iblis.
He said: Will I prostrate myself to one
whom Thou hadst created from clay? (17:61)

He said: Hadst Thou considered this whom Thou hadst held in esteem above me? If Thou hadst postponed for me to the Day of Resurrection, I will, certainly, bring under full control his offspring, but a few. (17:62)

He said: Go thou! And whoever of them heeded thee, then, truly, hell will be your recompense, an ample recompense. (17:63)

And hound whom thou wert able to of them with thy voice and rally against them with thy horses and thy foot soldiers and share with them in their wealth and children and promise them. And Satan promises them nothing but delusion. (17:64)

Truly, My servants, over them there is no authority for thee. And thy Lord sufficed as a Trustee. (17:65)

Commentary°

And when We said unto the angels who were on the earth: Fall down prostrate before Adam a prostration of greeting and they fell prostrate all save Iblis, he said: Shall I fall prostrate before that which You have created of clay?

Creation of Adam, the Human Being

Chapter 15: The 54th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We created the human being*
out of earth-mud of soft wet earth. (15:26)
And We created the ones who are spirits before
from the fire of a burning wind. (15:27)
And mention when thy Lord said to the angels:
Truly, I am One Who is Creator of mortals
out of earth-mud of soft wet earth. (15:28)
That is when I shaped him and breathed into him of My Spirit.
So fall down before him
as ones who prostrate themselves. (15:29)
The angels prostrated themselves, one and all, (15:30)
but Iblis.
He refused to be with the ones who prostrate themselves. (15:31)

Commentary°

Here, in [these signs], as we shall see, emphasis is placed on the secret of Adam's creation and the essential factors in the human being's constitution, leading him to follow either divine guidance or Satan's erring ways. Therefore, it begins by stating that Adam is created out of sounding clay and black mud molded into shape, before God breathed of His noble spirit into him. It also states that Satan was created before him, out of the fire of scorching winds. It tells of the angels' prostration before Adam, while Satan refused to so prostrate before a human being created of such low material, and how, as a result, God expelled him from heaven with a curse. God then accepted Satan's request to give him respite until the Day of Judgment. It adds Satan's own admission that he has no power over God's faithful servants. His power is only over those who submit to him in preference to submitting to God. It then states, without detail, the destiny of each of the two parties. The lack of detail here fits with the point of emphasis whereby the two essential factors are the human constitution, and the domain where Satan can influence the human being. At the outset the difference in the two natures is clearly stated. The dry clay which gives off a sound when knocked and

which is originally black mud given a specific shape is totally different from the fire described here as scorching, blowing fiercely. We learn later that another element is added to man's nature, namely, the breathing of God's spirit into it. Satan's nature, however, remained that of the fire of scorching winds.

[These signs 15:28-31] start with God's address to the angels. When, where and how He said all this are details that we have no way of knowing. We simply have no clear statement in the Quran that answers these points. Since these details belong to the realm of what lies beyond human perception, we have no way of knowing them. Therefore, any attempt to provide answers is futile. The same applies to the creation of the human being out of a dry clay, molded into shape, and infused with God's spirit.

We may refer to other statements in the Quran concerning this point. We may say on the basis of these statements that the human being and life itself originally come out of the earth's clay. The basic constituents of this clay are found in the physical constitution of the human being and all living organisms. There are several stages between the original clay and the human being's creation, and to these the term, line, refers. That is all that may be said on the basis of the texts we have. Any addition is no more than an overload added to the text, which the Quran does not need.

The Quran explains the human being's distinction in a clear and simple statement: The breath of God's spirit that was blown into the human being that takes the human being from the state of a humble organic entity to the noble human stage, right from his inception. It makes of him a distinguished creature worthy of being vicegerent on earth. How does this happen? In answer we ask: when was this human creature able to perceive how the Creator works?

Now we can stand on solid ground. Satan was created out of the fire of scorching wind, long before the human being's creation. This is as far as our knowledge goes. What Satan's nature is and how he was created are matters that we cannot delve into. However, we do understand that he shares some characteristics with the fire of scorching wind. We realize that he can affect the elements constituting mud and clay, since he is made out of fire. He also causes harm and is not slow to inflict it, since the fire he is made of is that of scorching wind. Then the story reveals to us his conceit, anger and arrogance, which is not far removed in our perception from the nature of fire.

Then human creation took place, starting with the sticky mud that had dried, then the adding of sublime spirit that brought about his distinction from all living creatures. This gave him his unique

human characteristics. Right from the beginning of human life, the human being has followed his own separate line, while animals remained in their own domain.

THE HUMAN BEING'S DUAL NATURE

It is this breath of God's spirit that provides the human being's link with the Supreme Society, making him worthy of contact with God, receiving His messages, and going beyond the material world of his physical constitution to the mental world of hearts and minds. It is this breath of God's spirit which allows the human being to go beyond time and space, and beyond the reach of his senses and physical ability to formulate perceptions and experience feelings that, at times, seem unlimited.

All this despite the heavy nature of clay which puts him in need of all that his clay constitution requires, such as food, drink, clothing and the satisfaction of desires. He also has his weaknesses, giving rise to faulty concepts and whims. Yet right from the beginning, the human being is a compound of these two inseparable elements. He has the nature of a compound, not that of a mixture. We need to keep this fact clear in our minds whenever we speak about human constitution from clay and sublime spirit. The two constituents are inseparable in his nature. In no situation does either element achieve total domination, completely excluding the other. The human being is not pure clay or pure spirit even for a single moment. Every single action and every single deed involves his whole make-up which is indivisible.

Achieving a proper balance between the clay and the sublime elements is the highest level the human being is called on to achieve. That is the stage of human perfection. He is not required to shed either element of his constitution so as to become either angel or animal. To attempt a rise that disturbs the balance is a shortcoming that does not suit a person's essential characteristics, or the purpose of his creation in this unique fashion. A person who tries to suppress his basic physical instincts is the same as one who tries to suppress his free spiritual powers. Both go beyond straight human nature, imposing on themselves something that God does not sanction. Both destroy themselves by distorting the basic compound of their very nature. They will have to account to God for such destruction.

Islam has formulated its own laws for human life taking into account the human being's constitution. It established a human system that does not suppress a single aspect of human potential. The whole purpose of this system is to establish a perfect balance between these

powers, so that they all work in concert, without allowing anyone of them to encroach on another. Any such encroachment leads to the negation of the other, and every dominance leads to destruction. The human being is responsible for the maintenance of the essential characteristics of his nature and his accountability to God. The system submission to God (*islam*) establishes for human life is geared to promote these characteristics which God has given to the human being for a clear purpose.

Anyone who wishes to kill the animal instincts in himself or herself destroys his or her unique constitution, just like one who wishes to kill the essentially human instincts such as faith and believing in what lies beyond the reach of our perception. Anyone who deprives people of their faith destroys their human entity, just like one who deprives them of their food, drink and other physical needs. Both are enemies of the human being, and both deserve to be driven away just like we must drive Satan away.

The human being is an animal with something extra. He has the same needs as an animal, but he has other needs on account of that extra element. These latter needs are not inferior to the 'essential needs' as claimed by advocates of materialistic creeds who are, in truth, enemies of humanity.

These are simply thoughts derived from the truth of our human constitution, as stated in the Quran. We have referred to them only briefly so that we do not delay any further the discussion of the Quranic text relating the most important story of human creation.

The Encounter and the Fall

God told the angels that He was creating a vicegerent. And what God said immediately took effect, for His word expresses His will, and His will is always done. We cannot question how the breath of God's eternal spirit mixed with the clay that has limited life. Such arguments are no more than idle play. It is indeed a child's play with the human intellect itself. It forces the human mind out of its own realm in which it may exercise its powers of perception, reflection and comprehension. All the controversy that has been raised over this issue, past and present, betrays ignorance of the nature of the human mind, its characteristics and limitations. It simply forces the human mind to try to measure God's work by human standards. It is an altogether wrong premise.

God simply says that this has happened without saying how. Therefore, the event itself is a fact that the human mind cannot deny. Yet it cannot prove it by any interpretation it invents, other than ac-

cepting what God has said. The human being is a creature with a beginning, and as such, he cannot judge what is eternal, or how the eternal creates. When the human mind accepts this point, it stops expending its power in futile argument.

What happened after God issued His order to the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam? That is in the nature of this aspect of God's creation, the angels. They obey God's orders whatever they are, without argument or delay. However, something else also took place at the same time: Iblis refused.

Again, the Angels Told to Prostrate Themselves Before Adam

Chapter 18: The 69th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And mention when We said to the angels:*
Prostrate yourselves to Adam!
So they prostrated themselves but Iblis.
He had been among the jinn
and he disobeyed the command of His Lord.
Will you, then, take him to yourselves
and his offspring to be protectors other than Me
while they are an enemy to you? Miserable was it to give in place
ones who are unjust! (18:50)

Tell the Angels All of the Names

Chapter 2: The 87th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *And He taught Adam the names, all of them.*
Again, He presented them to the angels and said:
Communicate to Me the names of these
if you had been ones who are sincere. (2:31)
They said: Glory be to ***You****!*
We have no knowledge but what ***You*** *had taught us.*
Truly, ***You****,* ***You*** *alone are The Knowing, The Wise.* (2:32)
He said: O Adam! Communicate to them their names.
So then, when he communicated to them their names,
He said: Did I not say to you:
Truly, I know the unseen of the heavens and the earth
and I know what you show
and what you had been keeping back. (2:33)
And mention when We said to the angels:
Prostrate yourselves to Adam!
They, then, prostrated themselves but Iblis.
He refused and grew arrogant.

He had been among the ones who are ungrateful. (2:34)
*And We said: O Adam! Inhabit the Garden, **you** and **your** spouse:*
Eat freely from it both of you wherever you both willed,
but come not near this, the tree
or you both will be among the ones who are unjust. (2:35)
Then, Satan caused both of them to slide back from there
and drove both of them out from that in which they both had been.
And We said: Get down some of you as an enemy to some other.
And for you on the earth, a time appointed
and sustenance for a while. (2:36)
Adam, then, received words from his Lord for He turned to him
in forgiveness. Truly, He, He is
The Accepter of Repentance, The Compassionate. (2:37)
We said: Get down altogether from it. And whenever guidance
approaches you from Me, then, whoever heeded My guidance,
then, there will be neither fear in them
nor will they feel remorse. (2:38)

Commentary°

The passage takes us right into the very scene in which we can see the angels in God's presence, and witness how He entrusts the human being with the task of God's vicegerent on earth. He has given the human being the great secret of knowledge and cognition, as well as the ability to assign names to persons and objects that serve as symbols denoting whatever they are assigned to, even though they are no more than sounds and words. The ability to know and name objects has had the most profound effect on human life on earth. We can only imagine what life would have been like without this communication tool to appreciate its value. Indeed, without it, human life and interaction would have been unthinkable, and there would have been no progress beyond a very primitive state. Without such ability, all communication would have necessitated the presence of the subject matter. Thus, if a group wants to discuss something related to a tree, a mountain, or a particular person, then that person should be brought before the group, or they should all go to the tree or mountain. Indeed, without the ability to use names and symbols, human life could not function. (2:31-32)

The angels have no use for such an ability because it is not required for their role. Therefore, they have not been given it. When God, having bestowed this great honor on Adam, asked the angels to identify certain objects, they could not because they did not possess the ability to use symbols and assign names or titles to things.

They admitted their inability and recognized the limits of their knowledge, prompting the comment that followed. (2:33)

This is undoubtedly the highest accolade bestowed upon the human being. For, despite the fact that he would commit corruption on earth and shed blood, he was elevated above the angels, endowed with the secrets of knowledge, and given a free and independent will to choose his destiny. The human being's dual nature, his ability to determine his own course of action, and the trust he carries to pursue God's guidance by his own means are all aspects of the high esteem in which he is held. The angels prostrated themselves before Adam in obedience to God's command, Here we see evil manifested in Satan's behavior as he disobeys God Almighty, vainly refuses to recognize honor where it is due, persists in his error and closes his mind to the truth.

The general drift of the narration suggests that Iblis was not one of the angels; rather, he was with them. For, had he been an angel, he would not have disobeyed God, since the angels' foremost characteristic is that they: do not disobey God in whatever He commands them and always do what they are bidden. (66:6) The fact that the Arabic construction here makes an exception in relation to Iblis does not mean that he is, or was, one of the angels. The exception is justified on the basis that he was with the angels. This is perfectly acceptable in Arabic, which allows the construction "the whole clan arrived but not Ahmad" without implying that Ahmad is a member of the clan.

Furthermore, the Quran specifically identifies Iblis as belonging to another type of extra-terrestrial creatures, the jinn, who are created out of fire, eliminating the idea that he was, at any time, an angel. (See 15: 27, 18:50, and 55:15)

The battle lines are drawn, and the long struggle commences between Iblis, the epitome of evil, and the human being, God's vicegerent on earth. This battle is fought within the human being's own conscience. Its outcome will be in human favor as long as he exercises his will and remains faithful to his covenant with God. Evil will triumph only if the human being succumbs to his own desires and alienates himself from his Lord. (2:34)

They had been allowed access to all the fruits of Paradise with the exception of one tree. That tree may be seen as a symbol of the things forbidden to human beings on earth, without which there would be no freewill for him to exercise. Human beings would have been indistinguishable from animals, acting on mere instinct. Without forbidden things, there would be no way of testing human willpower

and resolve in fulfilling his covenant with God. The human will is the deciding factor, and those who do not exercise their will, despite their human form, belong with animals and irrational creatures. (2:35)

So graphic and expressive is the Arabic word used here to express the act of luring away. We almost visualize the scene of Adam and Eve being tempted and manuvred so that they slip and fall out of Paradise.

Thus the test is over. Adam forgot his covenant and yielded to temptation, invoking God's inevitable judgment that they should be sent down to earth. (2:36) This was the signal for the battle between the human being and Satan to commence and continue until the end of time. (2:36)

But Adam, by virtue of his basically good and sound human nature, was awakened to his oversight and was saved by God's boundless mercy, which is always close at hand for the repentant to seek. (2:37)

God's final word has been spoken, and His full covenant with Adam and his offspring as His vicegerents on earth has been sealed and brought into effect. This covenant outlines the conditions that bring humanity prosperity and those that lead people to ruin. (2:38)

Thus the battlefield was transferred to its proper location, the planet earth, and the battle was to rage on unabated. From that early moment the human being was taught how to triumph over evil, and what would bring about his defeat and condemnation. It is now for him to choose how to act.

God Favored Adam

Chapter 3: The 89th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *Truly, God favored Adam and Noah*
and the people of Abraham
and the people of Imran above all the worlds.... (3:33)

Commentary°

Lo! God preferred, He has chosen, Adam and Noah and the House of Abraham and the House of Imran, meaning He preferred them above the worlds, by making prophethood reside in them and their progeny.

The Parable of Adam is like the Parable of Jesus

Madinah: *Truly the parable of Jesus with God*
is like the parable of Adam.

He created him from earth dust.
Again, He said to him: Be! Then, he is! (3:59)

Commentary°

God then explained the creation of Jesus without a father because the delegation of Najran asked the Prophet to provide proof from the Quran for his saying that Jesus was not the son of God, so God revealed this verse.

Children of Adam

Chapter 7: The 39th Chapter Revealed

O Children of Adam!
Surely, We caused to descend to you garments
to cover up your intimate parts and finery,
but the garment of God-consciousness, that is better.
That is of the signs of God so that perhaps they will recollect! (7:26)
O Children of Adam! Let not Satan tempt you
as he drove your parents out of the Garden,
tearing off their garments from both of them
to cause them to see their intimate parts.
Truly, he and his type sees you whereas you see them not.
Truly, We made he and the satans protectors
of those who believe not. (7:27)

*****

O Children of Adam! If Messengers from among you
approach relating My signs to you,
then, whoever was God-conscious and made things right,
then, there will be neither fear in them
nor will they feel remorse. (7:33)

*****

And mention when thy Lord took from the Children of Adam—
from their generative organs—
their offspring and called to them to witness of themselves:
Am I not your Lord? They said: Yea! We bore witness
so that you say not on the Day of Resurrection:
Truly, we had been ones who were heedless of this. (7:172)

Chapter 36: The 41st Chapter Revealed

Make I not a compact with you, O Children of Adam,
that you not worship Satan?
Truly, he is a clear enemy. (36:30

Chapter 17: The 59th Chapter Revealed

And, certainly, We held the Children of Adam in esteem.
And We carried them on dry land and on the sea
and provided them with what is good.
And We gave them advantage over many
of whomever We created with excellence. (17:70)

Cain and Abel

Chapter 5: The 112th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *And recount **you** to them the tiding of the two sons of Adam in Truth \when they both brought near a sacrifice and it was received from one of them but there is non-acceptance from the other. He said: I will, surely, kill **you**. He said: Truly, God receives only from the ones who are God-conscious.* (5:27)

*If **you** were to extend **your** hand against me so that **you** would kill me, I would not be one who stretches out my hand towards **you** so that I kill **you**. I fear God, Lord of the worlds.* (5:28)

*Truly, I want that **you** wilt draw the burden of my sin and **your** sin, then, to be among the Companions of the Fire. That is the recompense of the ones who are unjust.* (5:29)

Then, his soul prompted him to kill his brother. And he killed him and became among the ones who are losers. (5:30)

Then, God raised up a raven to scratch the earth, to cause him to see how to cover up the naked corpse of his brother. He says: Woe to me! Was I unable to be like this raven to cover up the naked corpse of my brother? Then, he became among the ones who were remorseful. (5:31)

On account of that, We prescribed for the Children of Jacob that whoever killed a person, other than in retribution for another person, or because of corruption in and on the earth, it will be as if he had killed all of humanity. And whoever gave life to one, it will be as if he gave life to all of humanity. And, certainly, our Messengers drew near them with the clear portents. Again, truly, many of them after that were ones who were excessive in and on the earth. (5:32)

Commentary°

Having related to his followers an account of certain events in the history of the Children of Jacob with their Prophet, Moses, the Prophet Muhammad is told by God to relate the story of two people representing two types of human being. The account should be given in all honesty, because it tells of the truth deeply entrenched in human nature. It also emphasizes the need for a deterrent legal code to ensure justice.

Adam's two sons were in a situation that gives no rise to any

thought of aggression in a good person's mind. The situation is one of obedience to God and offering a sacrifice to draw closer to God. We note that the passive mode is used here to indicate that the acceptance or rejection of the offered sacrifice is done by a higher power in a metaphysical way. This mode of expression suggests to us two points: the first is that we should not try to determine how exactly the offering was accepted. We need not discuss reports mentioned in books of commentary on the Quran because these reports are most probably derived from Old Testament fables.

The second point suggests that the one whose offering was accepted had not committed any crime that might cause anyone else to be angry with him to any extent, let alone that that person should plot a murder. He had no say in the acceptance of this offering. The nature of the One who accepted the offering was beyond the perception of either of the two brothers. Therefore, thoughts of anger or murder should have been far removed from the minds of both brothers. They were in a situation that is close to worship, since it involves offering a sacrifice for God's sake.

The latter declaring that he will kill the other is a statement of confirmed intention which is met by our disapproval because it is totally unjustified. Indeed, it could only be the result of blind envy that is alien to a good heart. Thus, from the very first moment, we take an attitude of total disapproval of aggression. The sign, however, greatly enhances the ghastliness of this act of aggression by showing the peaceful, good-natured attitude of the other brother when God says that God only receives from the God-conscious.

Enoch (Idris)

We are told in a commentary that Enoch was Noah's great-grandfather. Indeed he was a truthful one, a prophet.

Chapter 19: The 44th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And remember Enoch in the Book.*
Truly, he had been a just person, a Prophet. (19:56)
And We exalted him to a lofty place. (19:57)

Commentary°

The last prophet to be mentioned in this chapter is Enoch (Idris): And mention in the Book Enoch, who was a man of truth, a prophet. We raised him to a lofty station." (19: 56-57) We have no way of determining during which period of history Enoch lived. Most probably he was ahead of Abraham. He was not one of the Jewish prophets. There is no mention of him in the Jewish books. The Quran describes him as a man of truth and a prophet. It records the fact that God granted him honor and made him worthy of praise, elevating him to a lofty position.

There is a view we would like to mention here without suggesting whether it is true or false. Some Egyptologists suggest that Idris is an Arabicized form of Osiris in the same way as Yohanna is Arabicized as Yahya, and Elisha as Al-Yasa. We know that around Osiris many a legend has been woven. It is said that old Egyptians believed that he was elevated to heaven where he was established on a throne. Whoever, after death, is found to have to his credit more good deeds in this life than bad ones will join Osiris who has become an Egyptian deity. He is also said to have taught the Egyptians all that they knew before he was elevated to heaven.

Be that as it may, we confine ourselves to what the Quran states about Enoch without indulging in speculation. We only say that it is more probable that he lived before the time of Abraham.

Chapter 21: The 73rd Chaper Revealed

Makkah: *And Ishmael and Enoch and Ezekiel* (Dhul-Kifl),
all were of the ones who remain steadfast. (21:85)
And We caused them to enter into Our mercy.
They are the ones in accord with morality. (21:86)

Elisha (al-Yasa)

Chapter 38: The 38th Chaper Revealed

Makkah: *And remember Ishmael, Elisha* (al-Yasa), *and Ezekiel*

(Dhu-l Kifl) *And all are among the good.* (38:48)

Chapter 6: The 55th Chaper Revealed

Makkah: *And Zechariah and Yahya and Jesus and Elias* (Iliyas).
All were of hte ones who were in accord with morality. (6:85)
And Ishmael and Elisha (al-Yasa) *and Jonah and Lot.*
We gave all an advantage over the worlds (6:86)
and from among their fathers
and their offspring and their brothers.
We elected them and We guided them to a straight path. (6:87)

Ezekiel (Dhul Kifl)

Chapter 38: The 38th Chaper Revealed

Makkah: *And remember Ishmael, Elisha, and Ezekiel* (Dhu-l Kifl).
And all are among the good. (38:48)

Chapter 21: The 73rd Chaper Revealed

Makkah: *And Ishmael and Enoch and Ezekiel* (Dhul-Kifl),
all were of the ones who remain steadfast. (21:85)
And We caused them to enter into Our mercy.
They are the ones in accord with morality. (21:86)

Noah

Noah's Folk Were Defiant

Chapter 53: The 23rd Chaper Revealed

Makkah: ... *and the folk of Noah before.*
Truly, they had been they who do greater wrong
and ones who are defiant. (53:52)

The Folk of Noah Denied What Came Before Them

Chapter 50: The 34th Chaper Revealed

Makkah *The folk of Noah denied what came before them,*
and the Companions of the Rass and Thamud ... (50:12)

Commentary°

A Glance at History

The chapter (50) now opens some pages of the book of human history, speaking of the fate of past communities who argued about resurrection in the same way as did the Arab unbelievers, and who similarly denied God's messages. As a result, they incurred God's inevitable punishment: (50:12-15)

Al-Rass signifies a well over which there is no built wall, and the dales signifies an area thick with trees. The people of the wooded dales most probably refer to Shuayb's people.

The purpose of this quick reference to these peoples is certainly not to give any detailed information about them. It is only a reminder of the fate of earlier ungrateful communities. What is worth noting is that the sign mentions that each denied God's messengers in the plural. This emphasizes the unity of the divine message as all messengers preached the same faith. Thus, whoever denies anyone of Gods messengers actually denies them all, because he rejects the same message delivered by them all. God's messengers are brothers forming one community. They are like a tree with roots stretching far back into time. Each branch of that tree projects all its essential qualities, giving an image of the whole. Therefore, whoever cuts a branch actually cuts the tree and all its branches. Therefore, God's warnings came true and those communities suffered the fates known to listeners.

The Folk of Noah Deny Noah

Chapter 54: The 37th Chaper Revealed

Makkah: *The folk of Noah denied before them.*

They denied Our servant and said:
One who is possessed! And he was deterred. (54:9)
So he called to his Lord saying: I am one who is vanquished,
*so **You** help me.* (54:10)
So We opened the doors of heaven with torrential water. (54:11)
And We caused the earth to gush forth with springs
so the waters were to meet one another
from a command that was measured. (54:12)
And We carried him on a vessel of planks and caulked, (54:13)
running under Our eyes, a recompense
for Noah who had been disbelieved. (54:14)
And, certainly, We left this as a sign.
Then, is there one who recalls? (54:15)
So how had been My punishment and My warning? (54:16)

Commentary°

[These verses] use the description of what happened to the people of Noah inviting hearts to reflect after they have been shown one of the calamities that befell earlier deniers of the truth.

The Folk of Noah Denied What Came Before Them

Chapter 38: The 38th Chaper Revealed

Makkah: *The folk of Noah before them denied ...* (38:12)

Commentary°

Noah tells his people that if they are completely fed up with him, unable to tolerate his presence among them and his reminders of their duty to believe in God, then let that be as it may. He will continue along his way, unperturbed by their opposition, for "in God have I placed my trust." He seeks no help from anyone else.

It is a clear challenge thrown out by one who is absolutely certain of his ground and power. In fact he is inviting his opponents to attack him. What were the forces at his command facilitating such a challenge? He simply had faith, which gave him a power that is superior to everything else. Numbers, careful planning and firepower are of little use when compared to faith. He had God's support, and God does not abandon those who believe in Him. It is the challenge of one who relies on the source of real power, for faith establishes a bond between the believer and the One who has power over everything in the universe. It is neither an arrogant nor a foolhardy challenge. Rather, it is the challenge of true power.

Advocates of the divine faith have in God's Messengers a fine example to follow. They should have unwavering confidence as they place their trust in God and face tyranny, whatever its source may be. Tyranny will not cause them any real or lasting damage, apart from perhaps some physical pain that God allows as a test of the believers. God does not abandon the believers to His and their enemies, but He lets them undergo this test so that true believers come through it unharmed. The end favors the believers when God's promise is fulfilled and they are victorious.

The Quranic signs show that Noah exhibited intellectual humility and suspended judgment of the people. It is based on the recognition that one should not claim more than one actually knows. It does not imply spinelessness. It implies a lack of arrogance or conceit. It implies insight into the foundations of one's beliefs: knowing what evidence one has and how one has come to believe.

The Message of the Messenger Noah

Chapter 7: The 39th Chaper Revealed

Makkah: *Surely, We sent Noah to his folk.*
And he said: O my folk! Worship God!
You have no god other than He. Truly, I fear for you
the punishment of a tremendous Day. (7:59)
The Council of his folk said: Truly, we see you
clearly wandering astray. (7:60)
He said: O my folk! There is no fallacy in me.
I am only a Messenger from the Lord of the worlds. (7:61)
I state the messages of my Lord to you
and advise you and I know from God what you know not. (7:62)
Or marveled you that there drew near you
a remembrance from your Lord through a man among you
that he warn you and that you be God-conscious
so that perhaps you will find mercy? (7:63)
Then, they denied him.
Then, We rescued him and those who were with him
on the boat and We drowned those who denied Our signs.
Truly, they, they had been a folk in the dark. (7:64)

Commentary°

This is the solid unchangeable basis of divine faith, the mainstay of human life that guarantees the unity of direction and goal. It ensures that human beings are free from enslavement by their desires or by other human beings. It helps those who accept it to rise above

all that they desire and to resist all temptation and threats. (7:59)

The divine faith is a code for living based on the fundamental principle that all authority in human life belongs to God alone. This is the essential meaning of worshipping God alone and that God is the only deity acknowledged by human beings. (7:60)

Noah denies that he is in error, and explains to his people the true nature of his call and its origin. He has not invented it, but he is simply a messenger bearing a message from the Lord of humanity, and delivering it with honest advice, based on the fact that he knows of God what they do not know. He feels that knowledge within himself, because he has his link with God. (7:61)

Here we note a gap in the story. It seems that they have wondered that God should choose a human being, one of their number, to bear a message from Him to them, and that this human messenger should find within himself knowledge about his Lord which is not available to those who are not similarly chosen. This gap is indicated by what comes next. (7:63)

There is nothing strange about this choice. Indeed, everything about human beings is amazing. The human being deals with all the worlds and can have a direct link with his Lord because of what God has imparted to him and settled in his nature as a result of breathing into him of His Spirit. God certainly knows best whom to choose as His messenger. If God chooses a human being to bear His message, then this honored person can receive the message through his latent ability to be in contact with God who gives him his special status as a human being receiving honors no other creature receives.

Noah reveals to them the goal of his message. (7:63) There is first the warning so that their hearts respond and steer away from evil, as a prelude to eventually receiving God's grace. Noah himself has no personal interest or purpose other than this noble one.

The Folk of Noah Deny Noah

Chapter 25: The 42nd Chaper Revealed

Makkah: *And the folk of Noah*
when they denied the Messengers,
We drowned them.
And We made them as a sign for humanity.
And We made ready for the ones who are unjust
a painful punishment. ... (25:37)

Commentary°

It should be explained here that Noah's people denied only

Noah's message and their rejection applied only to him, but we have to remember that Noah only preached the faith advocated by all God's messengers. Therefore, when they rejected what he told them, it was as though they rejected all messengers, most of whom lived after their own time. God states that He made them an example for humanity. (25:37) The great floods could not be forgotten despite the passage of time. Anyone who looks carefully at the result of that flood will understand its lesson, provided he approaches it with an open mind. It is now ready, requiring no further waiting.

Those Who Believed Are Saved and the Ungrateful Drown

Chapter 26: The 47th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *The folk of Noah denied*
the ones who are sent (26:105)
when their brother, Noah, said to them:
Will you not be God-conscious? (26:106)
Truly, I am a trustworthy Messenger to you (26:107)
so be God-conscious and obey me. (26:108)
And I ask you not for any compensation for it.
My compensation is only from the Lord of the worlds. (26:109)
So be God-conscious and obey you me. (26:110)
They (the folk of Noah) said: Will we believe in you
when it is the most wretched that followed you? (26:111)
He said: And what knowledge
have I of what they had been doing? (26:112)
Truly, their reckoning is but
with my Lord if you be aware. (26:113)
I am not one who drives away the ones who believe. (26:114)
I am not but a clear warner. (26:115)
They said: If thou hast not refrained thyself, O Noah,
thou wilt, certainly, be among the ones who are stoned! (26:116)
He said: My Lord! My folk denied me, (26:117)
*so give **You** deliverance between me and them and victory*
and deliver me and whoever is
with me among the ones who believe. (26:118)
And We rescued him and whoever was with him
in the laden boat. (26:119)
Again, We drowned after that the ones who remained. (26:120)
In this is, truly, a sign, yet most of them
had not been ones who believe. (26:121)
***Your** Lord, He, truly, is*

The Almighty, The Compassionate. (26:122)

Commentary°

Such was Noah's message that his people denied, despite his being their brother. Such brotherhood should have ensured a peaceful relationship, leading to their belief in him and his message. But his people had no time for this bond of brotherhood, and they did not soften to their brother's call when he said to them. (26:106) Will you not worry about the end to which your attitudes and actions lead you?

This directive and reminder to fear God is consistent in these signs. Then every prophet that succeeded Noah said the same thing to his community. (26:107) He would not cheat, defraud or act dishonestly. He would not add to, or withhold anything from what he was required to deliver to his people. (26:108) In this case, Noah again reminds his people to fear God, giving it a more express definition this time. He appeals to their consciences to obey him as he calls on them to surrender themselves to God.

He then reassures them that he was neither looking for any worldly gain nor seeking any wage in return for advocating the divine message and guiding them to their Lord. He seeks only God's reward, because it was He who gave him his message. This assurance of seeking no gain or wage seems to have always been necessary for sincere advocacy of faith. It is, thus, distinguished from the familiar pattern of religion as exploited by clerics and religious orders for personal gain and enrichment.

Now that he has reassured them of having no personal ambition, Noah again tells them to be conscious of God, reminding them that they should obey him. (26:110) Their response, a singular objection, was the same given to all messengers. (26:111)

What they meant was that it was only the poor who followed him, because the poor are normally the first to accept divine messages and messengers. They are quick to believe in God and submit themselves to Him, because they are not deterred by any hollow status or fear of losing any interest or position as a result. The chiefs and nobles of society often fear for their interests that are based on false considerations, as also myths and legends that are given religious status. Moreover, they are unwilling to accept complete equality with the masses as a result of believing in God's oneness. Under such a belief system only faith and good action are given an appropriately high value, with the net result that some people rise and others fall by the single standard of faith that is complemented by good action.

Noah's reply, therefore, establishes true values, defining the mis-

sion of God's messenger and leaves judgment on people to God who knows best their intentions, thoughts and actions:

Said he: What knowledge do I have as to what they used to do in the past? Their reckoning rests with none other than my Lord, if you could but understand. I am not one to drive away the believers. I am only a plain warner. (26:112-26:115)

The nobility always speak in a derogative manner about the poor. They say that their habits and values are not acceptable to those who are in the higher echelons of society. They have nothing of their refinements. Noah tells them that he does not ask of people anything other than that they believe in God. Their actions are left to God to evaluate and to determine their appropriate reward. His, God's, is the right evaluation. Noah then defines his own mission. (26:115)

With such clear argument and plain logic, Noah's people were silenced. They had no meaningful reply to offer. Therefore, they resorted to the same method to which tyranny resorts every time it finds itself cornered; they threatened him with brute force. (26:116) Thus tyranny reveals its ghastly and cruel face.

Noah realized that their hardened hearts would not soften. Therefore, he turned to the One source of support that is always available to believers, never failing them: (26:117-26:118) His Lord certainly knew that his people had denied him and accused him of lying, but Noah needed to address his complaint to God, appealing to Him for justice. Thus, he puts the matter in His hands. (26:118) Such decisive judgment will put an end to tyranny and injustice. (26:118)

God certainly responded to His messenger's plea for help. (26:119-26:120) Thus, the end of this very early battle in human history between faith and unfaith is described in a very quick sequence of words, which also tell of the outcome of every subsequent battle between the two sides in human history.

Noah a Grateful Servant

Chapter 17: The 50th Chaper Revealed

Makkah: *O offspring of whomever We carried with Noah:*
Truly, he had been a grateful servant. (17:3)

Generations After Noah Perish

Makkah: *How many generations*
have We caused to perish after Noah?
And thy Lord sufficed as Aware,
Seeing the impieties of His servants. (17:17)

The Messages of Noah Referred to

Chapter 10: The 51st Chaper Revealed

Makkah: *And recount to them the tidings of Noah*
when he said to his folk:
O my folk! If my station had been troublesome to you
and my reminding you of the signs of God,
then, in God I put my trust.
So summon up your affair along with your ascribed associates.
Again, there be no cause for doubt in your affair.
Again, decide against me and give me no respite. (10:71)
Then, if you turned away, I asked you not for any compensation.
My compensation is with God.
And I was commanded
that I be of the ones who submit to God. (10:72)
Then, they denied him, so We delivered him
and some with him on the boat.
And we made them the viceregents
while We drowned those who denied Our signs.
Then, look on how had been the Ultimate End
of the ones who are warned! (10:73)
Again, We raised up Messengers after him to their folk.
They drew near them with the clear portents.
But they had not been believing
in what they had denied before of it.
Thus, We set a seal on the hearts
of the ones who exceed the limits. (10:74)

Commentary°

Only the end part of Noah's story is mentioned here where we see him offering his people a final challenge. He had spent a very long time preaching and warning his people, but to no avail. There is no mention of the ark here, or of those who were taken on board and so saved from the great floods. The aim here is to highlight the challenge and the believers' reliance on God, as well as the saving of a small, powerless group of believers and the destruction of the great hordes of the ungrateful. These signs reduce the whole story to a single episode so as to emphasize its final end. This is what is most fitting in the present context.

Noah tells his people that if they are completely fed up with him, unable to tolerate his presence among them and his reminders of their duty to believe in God, then let that be as it may. He will continue along his way, unperturbed by their opposition, for "in God have I

placed my trust." He seeks no help from anyone else.

Noah Builds an Ark and His Son is Drowned

Chapter 11: The 52nd Chaper Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We sent Noah to his folk:*
Truly, I am a clear warner to you (11:25)
that you worship none but God.
Truly, I fear for you the punishment of a painful Day. (11:26)
Then, the Council of those who were ungrateful
said from among his folk:
*We see **you** only as a mortal like us.*
*We see none followed **you** but those,*
they who are visibly our most wretched, simple minded.
Nor we see you as having any merit above us.
Nay! We think that you are ones who lie. (11:27)
He said: O my folk! Considered you that I had been
with a clear portent from my Lord
and that He gave me mercy from Himself
but it was invisible to you?
Then, will we fasten you to it
when you are ones who dislike it? (11:28)
And O my folk! I ask not of you wealth for it.
My compensation is but with God.
And I will not be one who drives away those who believed.
Truly, they are ones who will encounter their Lord
while I see you a folk who are ignorant. (11:29)
And O my folk! Who would help me against God
if I drove them away?
Will you not, then, recollect? (11:30)
And I say not to you: The treasures of God are with me
nor that I know the unseen nor I say:
Truly, I am an angel nor I say
of those whom your eyes look down upon:
God will never give them good.
God is greater in knowledge of what is within their souls for,
then, I would be of the ones who are unjust. (11:31)
*They said: O Noah! Surely, **you** had disputed with us,*
then, made much of the dispute with us.
*Now approach us with what **you** have promised us*
*if **you** had been among the ones who are sincere.* (11:32)
He said: Only God will bring it on you if He willed.
And you will not be ones who frustrate Him. (11:33)

And my advice will not profit you
—even if I wanted to advise you—
if God had been wanting to lead you into error.
He is your Lord and to Him you will return. (11:34)
Or they say: He devised it.
Say: If I devised it, my sin is upon me
and I am free of your sins. (11:35)
And it was revealed to Noah:
Truly, none of thy folk will believe but who had already believed.
So be you not despondent
at what they have been accomplishing. (11:36)
And craft you the boat under Our Eyes and by Our Revelation
and address Me not for those who did wrong.
They are, truly, ones who are drowned. (11:37)
And he crafts the boat.
Whenever the Council passed by him of his folk,
they derided him.
He said: If you deride us, then, we will deride you
just as you deride us. (11:38)
And you will know to whom will approach a punishment
covering with shame and on whom
an abiding punishment will alight! (11:39)
Until when Our command drew near and the oven boiled,
We said: Carry in it of every living thing,
two, a pair and thy people,
but him against whom the saying has preceded and who believed.
And none but a few believed with him. (11:40)
And he said: Embark in it. In the Name of God
will be the course of the ship and its berthing.
Truly, my Lord is Forgiving, Compassionate. (11:41)
So it runs with them amidst waves like mountains.
And Noah cried out to his son and he had been standing apart:
O my son! Embark with us and be you not
with the ones who are ungrateful! (11:42)
He said: I will take shelter for myself on a mountain.
It will be what saves me from the harm of the water.
Noah said: No one saves from the harm this day
from the command of God but him on whom He had mercy.
And a wave came between them
so he had been of the ones who are drowned. (11:43)
And it was said: O earth! Take in thy water!
And O heaven: Desist!

And the water was shrunken and the command of God
was satisfied and it was on the same level as Al-Judi.
And it was said: Away with the folk,
the ones who are unjust! (11:44)
And Noah cried out to his Lord and said:
My Lord! Truly, my son is of my people.
*And, truly, **Your** promise is The Truth.*
*And **You** are the Most Just of the ones who judge.* (11:45)
*He said: O Noah! Truly, he is not of **your** people.*
Truly, he, his actions are not in accord with morality.
*So ask not of Me what **you** have no knowledge.*
*Truly, I admonish **you** so that **you** not be*
of the ones who are ignorant. (11:46)
*He said: My Lord! Truly, I take refuge with **You** so that I not ask*
***You** of what I am without knowledge.*
*Unless **You** are to forgive me and have mercy on me,*
I would be of the ones who are losers. (11:47)
*It was said: O Noah! Get **you** down with peace from Us*
*and blessings on **you** and on communities*
*from whoever are with **you**,*
and communities to whom We will give enjoyment.
And, again, they will be afflicted by Us
with a painful punishment. (11:48)
*That is of the tidings of the unseen that We reveal to **you**.*
***You** have not been knowing of them*
*nor **your** folk before this. So have **you** patience.*
Truly, the Ultimate End is
for the ones who are Godfearing. (11:49)

COMMENTARY°

The Quran gives this account of the history of the age-old call to submission to the Will of god in order to provide landmarks for its advocates . These landmarks are not only relevant to the first Muslim community, the first to be addressed by the Quran, and the first to make it its operational guide as opposed to ignorance, but also to every Muslim community which stands up to ignorance anywhere in the world, at any time. This is what makes the Quran the permanent constitution of its message and the manual of every Quranic-based movement.

Every time the Quran mentions the approach of any messenger sent by God to any people, it quotes the messenger as saying: 'My people, worship God alone. You have no god other than He." 'Wor-

ship God alone' means total submission to Him alone in all matters which relate to this life or to the hereafter. This is indeed the original meaning of the word. The dictionary shows the word *abada*, which we now use primarily to denote worship, as meaning: to yield, submit and to lower one's rank to another. A *muabbad* road is one which has been leveled to facilitate travelling. *Abbada* is to enslave; that is, to cause someone to submit to another.

The Arabs who were first addressed by the Quran did not confine the import of the term abada to mere worship rituals. Indeed, when the Arabs were first addressed by this term in Makkah, no worship rituals had then been assigned to them. They understood it to mean that they were required to submit themselves to God alone in all their life affairs and to renounce submission to anyone else. The Prophet defined 'worship' in one of his pronouncements as meaning 'compliance', not as offering worship rituals.

The term 'worship' has come to signify worship rituals since these are one form of showing submission to God. This form does not by any means, however, encompass the full meaning of 'worship'. When the clear meanings of 'religion' and 'worship' faded from peoples' minds, they started to think that people abandon Islam only if they offer worship rituals to anyone other than God, such as idols and statues. They believe that if they avoid this particular form of ignorance they are protected against atheism, polytheism or any other form of ignorance generally and remain Muslims who could not be deprived of this status. They would thus continue to enjoy all the privileges of a Muslim with regard to the protection of life, honor and property.

This is a blatant fallacy based on distortions of the word 'worship' which decides whether a person is Muslim or not. This term signifies total submission to God in all matters and all affairs. As we have already said, this is the linguistic meaning of the word and the specific definition of it by the Prophet. When the Prophet has so clearly defined a certain term, no one can provide any other definition.

He certainly did not mean to tell his people not to offer worship rituals to anyone other than God, as imagined by those who give the term 'worship' the very narrow meaning of rituals. He meant total submission to God alone and the rejection of any false god or tyrant.

Their denial of God's revelations is manifest in their disobedience of His messengers and their following of arrogant tyrants. All these actions refer to the same thing. When any people disobey God's commands, they do indeed deny God's revelations and disobey His

messengers. They thus go beyond the pale of Islam into polytheism. We have already shown that Islam, in its broad sense, is the original status with which human life on earth started. It is indeed the faith brought by Adam when he fell from heaven and was put in charge of this earth. It is the faith Noah re- established on earth as he disembarked after the floods. People, however, will continue to deviate from Islam and sink back into ignorance until the call of Islam is successful in bringing them back to Islam. The cycle has continued until the present time.

The establishment of the oneness of God, the only God, Lord and Sustainer in the universe, and the only source of legislation in all matters, and the establishment of the only way of life acceptable to God are all aims which merit the sending of God's messengers. They also merit the exertion of great efforts by the messengers as well as the endurance of all the suffering the advocates of Islam have experienced throughout history. This is not because God needs to achieve these aims: He is in need of nothing and no one. They are worthy aims simply because human life cannot be put right, reformed, elevated and become worthy of man without the establishment of the faith based on God's oneness.

NOAH WAS GUIDED

CHAPTER 6: THE 55TH CHAPTER REVEALED

Makkah: ... *And Noah We guided before and among his offspring*
are David and Solomon and Job and Joseph
and Moses and Aaron.
And, thus, We gave recompense
to the ones who are doers of good. (6:84)

THE PRAYER OF NOAH

CHAPTER 37: THE 56TH CHAPTER REVEALED

Makkah 618: *And, certainly, Noah cried out to Us.*
And how excellent were the ones who answer! (37:75)
And We delivered him and his people
from tremendous distress. (37:76)
And We made his offspring—they, the ones who remain. (37:77)
And We left for him to say with the later ones: (37:78)
Peace be on Noah among the worlds. (37:79)
Thus, We give recompense
to the ones who are doers of good. (37:80)
Truly, he is one of Our believing servants. (37:81)
Again, We drowned the others. (37:82)

Commentary°

This reference to Noah includes his appeal to God and the full answer to his prayer by the best to give such an answer. It also tells of the fact that he and his household were saved from the great floods that drowned all except those whom God willed to be saved. It speaks of God's will to make of his offspring communities which build the earth and establish its heritage, while he himself, would he remembered by future generations until the end of time. It declares to all the worlds God's greeting to Noah, as he was one who fulfilled well the assignment given him. What reward could anyone wish for when he has received God's own greetings and is to be remembered for the rest of time? The mark of Noah's doing well that so ensured his great reward was his unshakeable faith. This outcome is brought about by faith. The unbelievers among Noah's people met their own ruin. (37:82) This has set the rule ever since the dawn of history. It is the pattern given in general terms immediately before these stories.

Noah Denied and the Confederates After Him

Chapter 40: The 60th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *The folk of Noah denied before them*
and the confederates after them.
And every community is about to take its Messenger
and they dispute with falsehood to refute The Truth.
So I took them.
And how had been My repayment! (40:5)

Commentary°

The people of Noah denied before them and also the factions, such as Aad, Thamud and others, who came after them. And every community sought to seize their messenger, to slay him, and they argued falsely thinking to rebut, to eliminate, thereby the truth. Then I seized them, with punishment; so how fitting was My punishment of them—in other words, it was appropriate.

Those Who Deny the Messengers are Punished

Makkah ... *in like manner of a folk of Noah and Ad*
and Thamud and those after them.
And God wants not injustice for His servants. (40:31)

Commentary°

Like the case of the people of Noah, and Aad, and Thamud, and those who came] after them, in other words, the same requital as was

customarily dealt to those who disbelieved before you, of their being chastised in this world, and God does not desire to wrong any of His servants.

The Fate of the People of Noah

Chapter 51: The 67th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And the folk of Noah from before.*
Truly, they had been a folk, ones who disobey. (51:46)

Noah Complains to God About the Arrogance of His People

Chapter 71: The 71st Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Truly, We sent Noah to his folk saying:*
Warn your folk before a painful punishment
approaches them. (71:1)
He said: O my folk! Truly, I am a clear warner to you: (71:2)
Worship God and be God-conscious and obey me. (71:3)
He forgives you some of your impieties
and postpones for you a term, that which is determined.
Truly, when the term of God drew near, it will not be postponed
if you had been but knowing. (71:4)
He said: My Lord! Truly, I called to my folk
nighttime and daytime, (71:5)
but my supplication increases not but their running away. (71:6)
And, truly, as often as I called to them
that You would forgive them,
they laid their fingertips over their ears
and covered themselves with their garments.
And they maintained growing arrogant
as they grew arrogant. (71:7)
Again, truly, I called to them with openness. (71:8)
Again, I spoke openly to them and confided in them,
keeping secret our converse. (71:9)
And I said: Ask for forgiveness of your Lord.
Truly, He had been a Forgiver. (71:10)
He sends from heaven abundant rain for you. (71:11)
He will furnish you relief with wealth and children.
And He will assign for you Gardens
and will assign for you rivers. (71:12)
What is it with you that you hope not
for dignity from God? (71:13)

And, surely, He created you in stages? (71:14)
Consider you not how God created the seven heavens,
one on another? (71:15)
And how He made the moon in them as a light
and how He made the sun as a light-giving lamp? (71:16)
And how God caused you to develop,
bringing you forth from the earth. (71:17)
Again, He will cause you to return into it
and bring you out in an expelling. (71:18)
And how God made for you the earth as a carpet (71:19)
that you may tread in it ways through ravines. (71:20)

NOAH PRAYS FOR THE DESTRUCTION OF THE PEOPLE

They followed such a one whose wealth
and children increase him not, but in loss. (71:21)
And they planned a magnificent plan. (71:22)
And they said: You will by no means forsake your gods,
nor will you forsake Wadd nor Suwa
nor Yaghuth nor Yauq nor Nasr. (71:23)
And, truly, they are going much astray.
And increase Thou not ones who are unjust
but in causing them to go astray. (71:24)
Because of their transgressions, they were drowned
and were caused to enter into a fire.
And they find not for themselves
any helpers other than God. (71:25)
And Noah said: My Lord! Allow not even one
on the earth from among the ones who are ungrateful! (71:26)
Truly, ***You****, if* ***You*** *were to allow them,*
they would cause ***Your*** *servants to go astray*
and they will but procreate immoral ingrates. (71:27)
My Lord! Forgive me and ones who are my parents
and whoever entered my house
as one who believes—the males, ones who believe
and the females, ones who believe
and increase not the ones who are unjust, but in ruin. (71:28)

COMMENTARY°

These signs begin with a statement defining the source of this message of divine faith. (71:1) This is the source that assigns tasks to Gods' messengers and from whom they learn the truth of faith. It is the source of all existence and all life. It is He who created human-

ity, giving their nature the ability to know and worship Him. When they deviated from this straight path, He sent them messengers to bring them back to Him. Noah was the first of these messengers after Adam. The Quran does not mention a message given to Adam after his fall to earth and life thereon. Perhaps he was a teacher who taught his children and grandchildren. With the passage of time, they went astray and adopted idols as deities. These were at first symbols of certain forces they considered holy. Then, they forgot what the symbols signified and worshipped the idols themselves. God sent them Noah to bring them back to believing in His oneness and give them the right concept of God, life and existence.

Having established the source of the message, these signs sum it up in a few words, and we learn that Noah was instructed to deliver a warning. (71:1) The report Noah presents to his Lord, as stated here shows that the state in which he found his people, heedless and arrogant, makes warning the sum of his message. In fact, the first thing he does by means of advocacy is to warn them of severe punishment, in either this world or the next, or in both.

The signs move straight from assigning the task to its fulfillment, in which the delivery of the warning is prominent. However, this is coupled with a note that raises the hope of the forgiveness of past sins and the deferment of reckoning until the Day of Resurrection. Moreover, the signs give a brief outline of the message Noah delivered to his people. (71:2)

He immediately states his role as a warner, clearly explaining his argument. He does not hesitate or wrap his words in a false cover. He leaves no one in confusion as to what he has to say, or what those who reject his message can expect. What he calls for is plain and simple. (71:3)

All worship must be addressed to God alone, without partners. Fearing God should be the quality that is clearly reflected in feeling and behavior. Obeying the messenger God sends to a people is the attitude that makes His orders the basis on which they build their way of life and how they determine their rules of behavior. These are the broad lines of divine faith in general, but messages may differ in points of detail as also in the concepts they outline, their relative scopes and how profound and comprehensive these are. To worship God alone provides a complete system of life that includes how man visualizes the nature of the Godhead and the nature of servitude to Him, the bond between the Creator and His creatures, as well as the nature of forces and values that operate in the universe and affect human life. Therefore, a system for human life is developed on the

basis of this concept, giving a special code of living. This code is based on the bond between God and His servants, and on the values He assigns to all things.

To be God-conscious is the true guarantee that people will follow this code of living, abide by it and never try to circumvent it or slacken in its implementation. Moreover, it is the quality that ensures sound moral behavior that seeks no reward other than being acceptable to God. Moreover, obeying God's messenger is the means that ensures remaining consistent, receiving guidance from its original source. It maintains the link with heaven through the messenger who receives instructions from on high.

These were the broad lines that constituted what Noah called on his people to believe in. They remain the essence of the divine faith for every generation. God promised them in reward what He promises those who turn to Him in repentance. (71:4) This sign states the reward promised for those who respond to the call to worship God alone, fear Him and obey His messenger. The reward is forgiveness of past sins, a respite lasting until the time appointed for reckoning, which means until the Day of Judgment, so that they will not be punished in this life like other communities that were totally destroyed. Later we see that Noah promised his people certain other things to be granted in this life.

Noah also confirms that this appointed time is inevitable: it comes at the moment determined for it. It will not be postponed like the delayed punishment in this world. (71:4) This statement may be understood to apply to every time appointed by God, so as to make this fact clear in their minds. It occurs at the appropriate place here, within the context of the promise that the reckoning will be deferred to the Day of Judgment if they heeded Noah's advice.

Untiring Efforts

Noah began his noble efforts to present guidance to his people. He had no personal interest in the matter, and stood to make no gain to compensate for all the arrogance and ridicule he had to put up with. He continued to do this for a thousand years minus fifty, with the number of those who responded positively hardly increasing. On the other hand, however, the level of rejection and insistence on following old erring ways did increase. At the end, Noah presented his account to God, who had assigned him this arduous task. He described his efforts even though he knew that God was fully aware of all that he had done. He is, therefore, simply making his heart-felt complaint to God, the only One to whom prophets, messengers and

true believers ever complain: Thus, Noah describes his untiring efforts at the end of his long, long journey. (71:5) He never slackened or showed any sign of boredom or despair in the face of determined and increasing opposition. (71:6) They ran away from the messenger who called on them to believe in God, the Giver of life, the Provider of everything they had and the Source of every light and guidance. Yet this messenger from whom they ran away never asked for anything in return for what he presented or taught them. He only called on them to believe so that they might be forgiven their sins.

When they could not physically run away, because he addressed them face to face, taking every opportunity to make his address heard, they loathed listening to him or even looking at him. They turned away in arrogance, intent on following their erring ways. (71:7) In this scene the advocate of the divine faith is seen using every opportunity to deliver his message, while they remain adamant, unwilling to hear. We see humanity here in its early stages, stubborn like a headstrong child, putting its fingers in its ears so that it does not hear, and covering its head and face. It is an image of childish resistance, thrusting their fingers in their ears, yet people can only put the tips of their fingers into their ears. The statement, thus, imparts an impression of violent reaction, as if they wanted to put their whole fingers into their ears to ensure that nothing of Noah's words could be heard. How childish!

In his strenuous efforts to fulfill his mission, Noah used every method, addressing them openly at times, and speaking to them in private on others. (71:8-71:9) In all this, he put before them immeasurable gains both in this life and in the life to come. The first prospect he put before them was forgiveness of their sins. (71:10) He also put before them the prospect of abundant provisions to be granted through rain pouring down in plenty, so that plants can grow and rivers run. He also added other types of God's grace, ones they loved dearly: children and wealth. (71:11-71:12)

Noah linked granting such provisions to seeking God's forgiveness of sins and misdeeds. This correlation between following God's guidance and attaining purity of heart on the one hand and a life of plenty and prosperity on the other is stated in several places in the Quran.

This is, then, a true rule repeatedly stated in the Quran. It is based on certain conditions involving a promise by God and the rules He set for human life. History confirms its fulfillment during different generations. The rule applies to communities and nations, not to individuals. Every community that implemented Gods law, truly

looking up to Him, doing good and beneficial deeds and seeking His forgiveness in a way that reflected fearing Him, benefited by this promise. Every community that worshipped God and feared Him, implementing His law and establishing justice and security for all people, was given provisions in plenty and a life of strength and affluence.

Having said this, we realize that some communities are left to enjoy a life of power and prosperity, despite the fact that they are far from being God-conscious or following His guidance. This is merely a test. Moreover, such prosperity is often accompanied by different ills such as the lack of social cohesion, loose morality, injustice, disregard for human dignity, etc. We see today two superpowers, seemingly enjoying power and plentiful provisions: one of them is capitalist while the other communist. In the first, morality has sunk to the lowest level. The prevailing vision of life has become so low that all life has become materialistic, measured by the dollar. In the other, the value of the human being has gone below the level of slavery. Intelligence agencies have become too powerful and people live in constant fear, threatened in their own homes. Several massacres have taken place, and no one is assured that by the morning his head will remain in place. A false allegation can easily find it chopped off. Neither condition can be described as a truly prosperous human life.

We continue with Noah and his untiring efforts. We see him trying to turn peoples attentions to the signs pointing to God, be these from within themselves or in the world around them. He wonders at their carelessness and rudeness. (71:13-71:14)

The stages of creation to which Noah refers must have been something which people either knew about or could understand at that time. He is obviously reminding them of something they know and hopes will have the desired effect of leading them to a positive response. Most commentators on the Quran say that the expression refers to the different stages the embryo goes through, starting with a gamete, then becoming a clinging cell mass, before it becomes a human embryo, and acquires a skeleton and is subsequently given its full shape and form. Noah's people could understand this because pregnant women suffered abortions at different stages of pregnancy, thus giving people a clear idea of how the human grows. This is one interpretation of the statement. It could also be a reference to what embryology says about the creation of the human being. It starts like a one-celled creature, then becomes like a multi-celled creature before acquiring the form of a water animal, then it becomes like a mammal, before it acquires human shape. This was however far from

comprehensible to Noah's people, being only a very recent discovery.

Noah draws the attention of his people to look at their creation and how it is done in stages. He reproaches them for knowing this and yet remaining insolent in their attitude towards their Lord. This is all very singular.

Noah directs his people's attention to the open book of the universe. (71:15-71:16) We cannot specify a meaning for the seven heavens on the basis of scientific theories about the universe, for these are only theories. Noah simply draws their attention to the skies. He tells them, as God taught him, that there are seven heavens in layers, and that they include the sun and the moon, which they could obviously see, just as they saw what they called the sky, which is that familiar blue colored space. To know what it is exactly is not necessary. Nor has it been properly proven even today. The invitation to look though is enough to reflect on the supreme power that has brought such great creatures into existence. This is what Noah wanted his people to do. He then invites them to look at their own creation, starting from dust and returning to it after death, and emphasizing the truth of resurrection (71:17-71:18)

The reference to the human being originating from the earth like a plant is both amazing and inspiring. This is certainly worth studying. It suggests that the origins of life on earth are the same, and that the making of the human being is the same as the making of plants. The human being is made of the earth's simple elements and feeds on such elements to grow. Thus, he is a plant like the rest of earth's plants. He is given a form of life different from that of plants, but both originate from mother earth, which suckles them both. We see how faith gives a believer a complete and true concept of his relation to the earth and to other living things. This concept combines scientific accuracy with warm feelings, which is the distinctive mark of true Quranic knowledge.

Those people who came out of the earth will go back into it, because God determines so, just like He brought them into being out of it. Their ashes become mixed with its dust and they become part of it again, just as they were before. Then again, God will bring them out like He did the first time. It is a simple matter that does not require a moments hesitation if we only look at it from this Quranic angle. Noah points out this truth to his people so that they feel how Gods hand lets them grow out of the earth like plants do, and then returns them there. Once they do this, they can easily expect the second life and take it into account. It is so simple and easy, needing no further argument.

Finally, Noah directs his people's hearts to reflect on Gods blessing as He enabled them to live easily on earth, conducting their various activities with ease and comfort. (71:19-271:0) This reality is so close to them and they see it all the time in full view. They cannot escape it like they tried to escape from Noah and his warnings.

In relation to them, the earth is stretched out like a vast expanse. Even in its mountains, God placed paths that are easy for them to traverse. They walk and travel even more easily on the plains. They can thus move about seeking God's bounty, and exchanging goods and benefits. They did not need scientific studies that sought to understand the natural laws that govern and facilitate their life on earth in order to appreciate all this. Indeed, the greater human knowledge gets the more evident the truth of this statement is.

We see how Noah tried to address his people in various ways, employing a wide range of methods. We also see his patience, perseverance and conscientiousness. He continued to exert these efforts over 950 years before giving this report to his Lord, complaining of the response he had had to contend with. From his succinct and accurate account we see a splendid image of the great efforts he made. Yet all this is merely one ring in the chain of divine messages to humanity.

So, what happens next? (71:21-71:24) It is a heart-felt complaint. After all Noah's endeavors, guidance and sound advice and the promise of an easy, plentiful life, they chose to disobey and follow the lead of those who had gone far astray, only because the latter enjoyed wealth, children and power. Yet such leaders benefit nothing by all these blessings. (71:21) What they possessed of wealth and children tempted them to go further astray, a scenario that could only end in misery and ruin. Yet these leaders did not stop at just going astray. (71:22) Their plot was on a grand scale, and its aim was to foil Noah's efforts, to suppress his message and to prevent it from addressing people's hearts. They schemed to give their disbelief and ignorance an attractive color. Therefore, they urged people to adhere to their false beliefs and to continue to worship those idols whom they called gods. They sought to arouse peoples personal emotions, making them feel that these idols were their own gods. They mentioned the names of the most important ones, so as to stir peoples false pride in them. (71:23) These were indeed the largest and the most important of their idols. Indeed, they continued to be worshipped in other ignorant communities until the time of the Islamic message.

This remains the practice of erring leaderships. They create idols

that may differ in name and form, according to the going trends in different ignorant societies. They seek to rally the masses around such idols and stir their emotions to defend them so that they can lead them wherever they want to, ensuring that they remain in error. This is how they manage to lead people astray. (71:24) Indeed every type of erring leadership tries to rally the people around idols, which may be in the form of statues, or humans or ideas. They are all the same, manipulated to turn people away from the divine message, creating a schism between them and its advocates. It is all part of a grand scheme, a mighty plot with a selfish end.

A passionate prayer is then voiced by Noah against the oppressors, the wrongdoers who lead people astray through plots and schemes of their own devising. (71:24) It is the prayer of one who has tried for a long time, making every effort and using every method. Eventually, however, he came to the conclusion that those erring, wrongdoing hearts were altogether devoid of goodness, undeserving of divine guidance.

Before completing Noah's prayer, the sign gives us an image of the end suffered by those wrongdoers in this life and in the life to come. Both situations are present in God's knowledge. They are events that admit no change:

Because of their sins, they were drowned, and were made to enter the fire. They found none besides God to support them. (71:25)

It is because of their sins and disobedience that they were made to drown and enter the fire. The two events are intentionally joined in succession, because their entry into the fire is connected to their drowning. The time gap between the two is so short that it is almost non-existent; according to God's measures it is negligible. The sequence is there: they were drowned in this life and they are made to enter the fire in the life to come. What is in between is perhaps the torment in the grave during the short gap between the two lives. (71:25) None whatsoever! No children, no wealth, no power and no patron from among their alleged deities.

In a single short verse, these mighty ones are swept away and no mention is left of them in human memory. No details are given here of their drowning or the floods that swept them away. This because the signs want to leave us with the impression of swift punishment. Indeed, it covers the gap between their drowning and their entry into hell with the conjunction, rendered in translation as and'. This is a common feature of the inimitable Quranic style. Therefore, we do not go into any further details of this event here.

The sign then gives the remainder of Noah's passionate prayer:

In his heart of hearts, Noah felt that the earth needed to have a complete change, a change that would eradicate the evil that had become so deeply entrenched among his people. Sometimes, only such eradication of the wrongdoers from the face of the earth will suffice. Their continued presence may put the divine message under siege, preventing it from touching people's hearts. This is exactly the scenario Noah states in his appeal to God to destroy these tyrannical oppressors, leaving none of them to walk the earth. He says: "If You spare them, they will lead Your servants astray." (71:27) Describing those people forced to go astray as "Your servants" suggests that they are the believers. This is a reference to how such wrongdoers will always use brute force to turn people away from divine faith. He may also mean that they lead others astray when people see them enjoying power and authority, without being punished for their wrongdoing.

Moreover, they create an environment in which the ungrateful are born and reared. This whole environment of ingratitude and its determined rejection of God's message leaves no way for the young to see the light. It overwhelms them with its erroneous beliefs and practices. It is to this fact that Noah, God's noble messenger, refers when he says that these wrongdoers will. (71:27) They create within the community an atmosphere based on falsehood and establish systems, traditions and situations that only help to lead the young into sin and disbelief. Thus, the new generation will always be composed of sinners and the hardened ungrateful as Noah said.

It is for this reason that Noah made his sweeping appeal to God, and God answered his prayer, washing that evil off the face of the earth. Noah ended his appeal against the ungrateful by a request to God to increase their ruin. (71:28)

Noah also made a different sort of passionate and humble appeal to God. (71:28) His prayer that God forgives him his sins is an aspect of the good manners all prophets maintain when addressing God. Noah knows that he is only a human being appealing to God. He knows that no matter how diligent he is in his obedience and worship, he makes mistakes and remains short of the high standard believers should try to attain. He also realizes the truth the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) later expressed when he said that no human being, not even a prophet, is admitted into heaven on the basis of his actions only, unless God bestows His grace on him. This appeal for forgiveness is exactly what he called upon his people to do, but they were too arrogant to take heed. Yet Noah, God s noble messenger who has untiringly sought to advocate God's message, seeks God's forgiveness at the moment he presents his account.

His prayer for his parents is an aspect of dutifulness towards parents who are believers. This is what we understand from the fact that he prayed for them. Had they been ungrateful, he would have been told not to pray for their forgiveness, as he was told that his son, an ingrate, met his merited fate when he was drowned with the rest of the unbelievers.

His special prayer for everyone who entered his home as a believer marks the mutual love between believers. Everyone loves for others to receive the same grace as he receives. This special mention of those who enter his home refers to the fact that they were the ones to be saved from the floods; they were the ones on the Ark with him.

Noah's final prayer is for the forgiveness of all believing men and women throughout all generations and localities. It emphasizes the close bond that unites them all, different as their communities and times may be. This is a remarkable quality of the divine faith, establishing this strong bond of genuine love between all believers across the centuries. It tells of the hidden secret God has incorporated into the divine faith and placed in believers' hearts.

Contrasted with this love among believers is the genuine aversion expressed towards the ungrateful. (71:28) In this way do the digns conclude after having given us a bright picture of Noah's struggle, as contrasted with the stubborn rejection by the ungrateful. It leaves us with feelings of love towards this great prophet, and admiration for his hard struggle. It strengthens our resolve to follow the same route no matter what hardship we have to endure and no matter what sacrifices we are called upon to make. It is the only route that ensures mankind attains the highest standard possible in their life on earth.

The Folk of Noah Denied Noah

Chapter 14: The 72nd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Approach not to you the tidings*
of those before you:
The folk of Noah and Ad and Thamud
and of those after them.
None knows them but God.
Their Messengers drew near them with the clear portents,
but they shoved their hands into their mouths in denial.
Then, they said: Truly, we disbelieved in what you were sent
and we are in uncertainty about that to which you call us.

We are in grave doubt. (14:9)

Noah Had Been a Grateful Servant Who was Saved

Chapter 21: The 73rd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And mention Noah, when he cried out before*
and We responded to him.
And We delivered him and his people
from the tremendous distress. (21:76)
And We helped him against the folk who denied Our signs.
Truly, they had been a reprehensible folk.
So We drowned them one and all. (21:77)

Noah's Message to His People

Chapter 23: The 74th Chapter Revealed

Makkah 620: *And, certainly, We sent Noah to his folk.*
And he said: O my folk! Worship God!
You have no other god but Him.
Will you not, then, be God-conscious? (23:23)
But said the Council who were ungrateful among his folk:
This is nothing but a mortal like you.
He wants to gain superiority over you. (23:24)
If God willed He would have caused angels to descend.
We heard not such a thing from our fathers, the ancient ones. (23:25)
He is nothing but a man in whom there is madness.
So watch him for awhile.
He said: My Lord! Help me because they denied me.(23:26)
*So We revealed to him: Craft **you** the boat under Our eyes*
and by Our revelation.
Then, when Our command drew near and the oven boiled,
*then, insert two pairs of each kind and **your** people,*
but whomever against whom the saying has preceded.
And address Me not for those who did wrong.
Truly, they are ones who are drowned. (23:27)
*When **you** and whoever is with **you** are seated in the boat,*
then, say: All Praise belongs to God
*Who delivered us from the folk, the ones who are unjust.** (23:28)
*And say: My Lord! Land **You** me with a blessed landing*
*for **You** are Best of the landing-places.* (23:29)
Truly, in this there are signs and, truly,
We had been ones who test. (23:30)
Again, We caused to grow another generation after them. (23:31)

We sent a Messenger to them from among them saying that:
Worship God! You have no god other than Him.
Will you, then, not be God-conscious? (23:32)
And said the Council of his folk to those who were ungrateful
and denied the meeting in the world to come,
and to whom We gave ease in this present life:
This is nothing but a mortal like you.
He eats of what you eat and he drinks of what you drink. (23:33)
And if you obeyed a mortal like yourselves,
truly, then, you are ones who are losers.(23:34)
Promises He that when you died
and had been earth dust and bones,
that you will be ones who are brought out? (23:35)
Begone! Begone with what you are promised! (23:36)
There is nothing but this present life.
We die and we live and we shall not be ones who are raised up. (23:37)
He is nothing but a man. He devised a lie
against God and we are not ones who will believe in him. (23:38)
He said: My Lord! Help me because they denied me. (23:39)
He said: In a little while they will become
ones who are remorseful. (23:40)
Then, a Cry duly took them so We made them into refuse.
So away with the folk, the ones who are unjust! (23:41)
Again, We caused to grow after them other generations. (23:42)
No community precedes its term, nor delays it. (23:43)
Again, We sent Our Messengers one after another.
Whenever drew near a community a Messenger to them,
they denied him.
So We caused some of them to pursue others
and We made them tales.
So away with the folk who believe not! (23:44)

Commentary°

[This signs] begins with a statement defining the source of this message of divine faith. (23:1) This is the source that assigns tasks to God's messengers and from whom they learn the truth of faith. It is the source of all existence and all life. It is He who created humanity, giving their nature the ability to know and worship Him. When they deviated from this straight path, He sent them messengers to bring them back to Him.

Noah was the first of these messengers after Adam. The Quran does not mention a message given to Adam after his fall to earth and

life thereon. Perhaps he was a teacher who taught his children and grandchildren. With the passage of time, they went astray and adopted idols as deities. These were at first symbols of certain forces they considered holy. Then, they forgot what the symbols signified and worshipped the idols themselves. God sent them Noah to bring them back to believing in His oneness and give them the right concept of God, life and existence.

Having established the source of the message, [these verses] sum it up in a few words, and we learn that Noah was instructed to deliver a warning. (23:l) The report Noah presents to his Lord, as stated here shows that the state in which he found his people, heedless and arrogant, makes warning the sum of his message. In fact, the first thing he does by means of advocacy is to warn them of severe punishment, in either this world or the next, or in both.

The signs moves straight from assigning the task to its fulfillment, in which the delivery of the warning is prominent. However, this is coupled with a note that raises the hope of the forgiveness of past sins and the deferment of reckoning until the Day of Resurrection. Moreover, the sgns give a brief outline of the message Noah delivered to his people. (23:2) He immediately states his role as a warner, clearly explaining his argument. He does not hesitate or wrap his words in a false cover. He leaves no one in confusion as to what he has to say, or what those who reject his message can expect. What he calls for is plain and simple. (23:3) All worship must be addressed to God alone, without partners. Fearing God should be the quality that is clearly reflected in feeling and behavior. Obeying the Messenger God sends to a people is the attitude that makes His orders the basis on which they build their way of life and how they determine their rules of behavior.

To be God-conscious is the true guarantee that people will follow this code of living, abide by it and never try to circumvent it or slacken in its implementation. Moreover, it is the quality that ensures sound moral behavior that seeks no reward other than being acceptable to God. Moreover, obeying God's messenger is the means that ensures remaining consistent, receiving guidance from its original source. It maintains the link with heaven through the messenger who receives instructions from on high.

These were the broad lines that constituted what Noah called on his people to believe in. They remain the essence of the divine faith for every generation. God promised them in reward what He promises those who turn to Him in repentance. (23: 4) This sign states the reward promised for those who respond to the call to worship God

alone, fear Him and obey His messenger. The reward is forgiveness of past sins, a respite lasting until the time appointed for reckoning, which means until the Day of Judgment, so that they will not be punished in this life like other communities that were totally destroyed. Later we see that Noah promised his people certain other things to be granted in this life.

Noah also confirms that this appointed time is inevitable: it comes at the moment determined for it. It will not be postponed like the delayed punishment in this world. (23:4) This statement may be understood to apply to every time appointed by God, so as to make this fact clear in their minds. It occurs at the appropriate place here, within the context of the promise that the reckoning will be deferred to the Day of Judgment if they heeded Noah's advice.

The Message of Noah

Noah stayed with his people and exhorted them to goodness for 950 years; but they rejected Noah's exhortation and the flood overtook them.

Chapter 29: The 85th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We sent Noah to his folk*
and he lingered in expectation among them a thousand years
less fifty years.
And the Deluge took them while they were
the ones who are unjust. (29:14)
Then, We rescued him and the Companions of the Ark
and made it a sign for the worlds. (29:15)

God Favored Noah

Chapter 3: The 89th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *Truly, God favored Adam and Noah*
and the people of Abraham and the people of Imran
above all the worlds,. (3:33)

Generations Raised After Noah's People Denied Messengers

Other generations and other messengers one after another sent to warn humanity; every messenger was belied.

Chapter 22: The 103rd Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *And if they deny **you** surely,*
*the folk of Noah denied before **you***
and Ad and Thamud. (22:42)

Ungrateful Wrong Themselves

Chapter 9: The 113th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *Approaches them not the tidings*
of those before them
—the folk of Noah and of Aad and of Thamud,
and of a folk of Abraham,
and of the Companions of Midian,
and that which are cities overthrown?
Their Messengers approached them with the clear portents.
So it had not been God who did wrong to them,
rather, they had been doing wrong to themselves. (9:70)

Commentary°

Has not the tidings, the tale, of those before them reached them — the folk of Noah, and Aad, the folk of Hud, and Thamud, the folk of Salih, and the folk of Abraham, and the dwellers of Midian, the folk of Shuayb, and the Deviant cities, the cities of the folk of Lot, meaning, its inhabitants. Their messengers brought them clear proofs, with miracles, but they denied them, and so were destroyed. God would never have wronged them, by punishing them for no sin on their part, but they wronged themselves, by committing sin.

The Companions of the Ark (al-Safina)

Chapter 29: The 85th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We sent Noah to his folk*
and he lingered in expectation among them a thousand years
less fifty years.
And the Deluge took them while they were
the ones who are unjust. (29:14)
Then, We rescued him and the Companions of the Ark
and made it a sign for the worlds. (29:15)

Hud and the People of Aad

Chapter 89: The 10th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Have you not considered*
how your Lord accomplished with Aad, (89:6)
with Iram of the pillars (89:7)
of which are not created the likes in the Land? (89:8)

Commentary°

The subject of the oath is omitted, but it is explained by the discussion that follows on tyranny and corruption. The punishment inflicted by God on the insolent, tyrannical and corrupt communities is a law of nature asserted by this oath. (89:6-89:14)

The interrogative form in such a context is more effective in drawing the attention of the addressee, who is, in the first instance, the Prophet (peace be upon him) and then all those who may ponder over the fates of those past communities. The people of the Prophet's generation, who were the first to be addressed by the Quran were aware of what happened to these nations. Their fates were also explained in reports and stories conveyed by one generation to another. The description of these outcomes as the deeds of God is comforting and reassuring for the believers. It was particularly so to those believers in Makkah who, at the time when this chapter was revealed, were subjected to relentless persecution and hardship by the unbelievers.

These short verses refer to the fates of the most powerful and despotic nations in ancient history. They speak of the earlier tribe of Aad of Iram, a branch of extinct Arabs. They used to dwell in al-Ahqaf, a sandy piece of land in southern Arabia, midway between Yemen and Hadramowt. The Aad were nomadic, using posts and pillars to erect their tents. They are described elsewhere in the Quran as being extremely powerful and aggressive. Indeed they were the most powerful and prestigious of all contemporary Arabian tribes. (Verse 8) The distinction here is restricted to that particular age.

(Iram: According to Islamic beliefs, King Shaddad defied the warnings of the prophet Hud and God smote the city, driving it into the sands, never to be seen again. The ruins of the city lie buried somewhere in the sands of the Rub al-Khali. Iram became known to Western literature with the translation of The Book of One Thousand and One Nights.)

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Other Warners Sent

Chapter 50: The 34th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *... and Aad and Pharaoh and the brothers of Lot [denied]* ... (50:13)

The Folk Who Deny

Chapter 38: The 38th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *The folk of Noah before them denied and Aad and Pharaoh, the possessor of the stakes,* (38:12)

The Message of the Messenger Hud

Hud exhorting his people to serve only God and none else; the people challenging Hus against the threats of the wrath of God; the punishment they suffered.

Chapter 7: The 39th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And to Aad, God sent their brother Hud. He said: O my folk! Worship God. You have no god but He.*

Will you not, then, be Godfearing? (7:65)
The Council of those who were ungrateful said among his folk:
Truly, we see foolishness in ***you.***
And, truly, we think that ***you*** *are among the ones who lie.* (7:66)
He said: O my folk! There is no foolishness in me.
I am only a Messenger from the Lord of the worlds. (7:67)
I state the messages of my Lord to you
and I am one who gives advice to you, trustworthy. (7:68)
Or marveled you that there drew near you
a remembrance from your Lord
through a man from among you that he may warn you?
And remember when He made you viceregents
after the folk of Noah
and increased you greatly in constitution?
Then, remember the benefits of God
so that perhaps you will prosper. (7:69)
They said: Hast thou brought about to us
that we should worship God alone
and forsake what our fathers had been worshipping?
So approach us with what thou hast promised us
if ***you*** *had been among the ones who are sincere.* (7:70)
He said: Surely, fell on you disgrace and anger from your Lord.
Dispute you with me over names which you named,
you and your fathers,
for which God sent not down any authority?
Then, wait awhile. Truly, I will be with you
among the ones who are waiting awhile. (7:71)
Then, We rescued him and those with him by a mercy from Us.
And We severed the last remnant of those who denied Our signs.
And they had not been ones who believe. (7:72)

Commentary°

They followed the same pattern as Noah's people, rejected the warnings, and refused to reflect on what happened to those who went along before them. (Verse 65) This implies a strong criticism of their attitude as they show no fear of God and no worry about a terrible destiny.

The People of Aad

Chapter 25: The 42nd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: ... *and Aad and Thamud*
and the Companions of the Rass

and many generations in between that. (25:38)

Commentary°

And, mention, Aad, the people of Hud, and Thamud, the people of Salih, and the dwellers at al-Rass — the name of a 'well'; their prophet is said to have been Jethro (Shuayb); although some say it was someone else. The story is that they had been sitting around it on one occasion when it collapsed beneath them burying them together with their dwellings. And many generations, peoples, in between, that is, between the people of Aad and the dwellers at al-Rass.

Hud Advises his People to Guard Themselves Against Evil

Chapter 26: The 47th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *The Aad denied the ones who are sent* (26:123)
when their brother Hud said to them:
Will you not be God-conscious? (26:124)
Truly, I am a trustworthy Messenger to you, (26:125)
so be God-conscious and obey me. (26:126)
And I ask you not for any compensation for it.
My compensation is only from the Lord of the worlds. (26:127)
Build you a sign on every high hill to amuse? (26:128)
And take you for yourselves castles
so that perhaps you will dwell in them forever? (26:129)
And when you seized by force,
seized you by force haughtily? (26:130)
So be God-conscious and obey me. (26:131)
Be God-conscious of Him Who furnished relief to you
with all that you know. (26:132)
He furnished relief to you with flocks and children (26:133)
and gardens and springs. (26:134)
Truly, I fear for you the punishment
of a tremendous Day. (26:135)
*They said: It is equal to us whether **you** were to admonish*
*or **you** have not been among the ones who admonish.* (26:136)
Truly, this is nothing but morals of the ancient ones (26:137)
and we are not ones who are punished. (26:138)
So they denied him and We caused them to perish.
Truly, in this is a sign yet most of them
had not been ones who believe. (26:139)
*And, truly, **your** Lord, He is, certainly,*
The Almighty, The Compassionate. (26:140)

Commentary°

The story of Hud and his people has the same beginning as Noah's story: The Aad, too, denied God's messengers. Their brother Hid said to them: Will you have no fear of God? I am a Messenger [sent by Him] to you, worthy of all trust. So, fear God and pay heed to me. No reward whatever do I ask of you for it: my reward is only from the Lord of all the worlds. (26:123-26:127)

It is the same message given by every messenger of God: it is a call to believe in God alone and to fear Him and obey His messenger. This is coupled with a declaration disclaiming any interest in worldly luxuries or position the people may have to offer. This puts things in the right perspective. The messenger seeks nothing from them, but instead he looks to God for his reward.

Had follows this declaration by examining their own particular conditions and behavior. He criticizes the fact that they build lofty buildings to demonstrate their ability, taking pride in their wealth. He denounces their arrogance which results from their material power and the resources that enable them to use different forces and means, in total disregard of God, oblivious to the fact of their accountability to Him. (26:128-26:129)

It seems that they used to build on high places so as to make such structures appear from a distance as grand landmarks. They did so to emphasize their superiority and great ability. Hence the Quran describes it as a vain endeavor. Had it been intended as a landmark or a sign to show direction, it would not have been described as such. The Quranic statement, then, implies the need to direct one's resources and abilities to what is of benefit, not merely to show off and demonstrate abilities and wealth. It also appears that the people of Aad were well advanced in industry, using machinery to carve positions for their palaces that they built on mountains. This is indicated in what Hud said to them. (Verse 129) It even occurred to them that such strong structures built with the use of heavy machinery could spare their lives, and protect them from severe atmospheric conditions as also from enemy attack.

They have further practices that are strongly criticized by Hud. (26:130) They were mighty, hard, tyrannical and would deal with others using utmost cruelty, like many others who rely on material power.

Hud, therefore, reminds them that they must fear God and obey His messenger. This would be sure to redress their cruelty and put a stop to their arrogance. (26:131) He further reminds them of God's grace, as it is He who has favored them with His blessings that they

use arrogantly as also to oppress others. They should have remembered God's favors and given thanks for them. They should also bear in mind that the One who has granted them such favors can easily take them back, or punish them for putting His favors to wrong use. (26:132-135)

Hud's reminder mentions first the One who granted them such blessings before enumerating them. He then gives further details." (26:133-134) These were the best favors that they could have enjoyed during that period of time. They are indeed a great favor at any time. He then warns them against punishment that may befall them on an awesome day. His warning expresses his fear for their end, because he is one of them, their brother, and he wants to spare them the hardship of that day which is certain to come.

But his reminders and warnings do not touch their hardened hearts. They stubbornly refuse to mend their ways. (26:136) This is a derogatory way of speaking, one which expresses their carelessness for whatever he might say. They add a clear indication that they are hardened in their ways, relying totally on what they have inherited from previous generations. (26:137-138) Their only argument in defense of all the practices Hud has criticized them for is that they are following earlier generations, towing their line. They then deny the possibility of being punished for following in their ancestors' footsteps. (26:138)

[These verses do] not mention here any of the arguments that took place between them and Hud. It proceeds straight to the end (26:139) These two short sentences, expressed in the original Arabic text by only two words, fakadhdhabuhu faahlaknahum, spell out the end of the mighty people of Aad and their great symbols of power. Nothing is left of their luxuries, cattle, children, gardens and springs.

How many a community has followed the same practices as the people of Aad, moving further away from God with every new aspect of civilization they have achieved. They always think that man can be independent of God. They try to produce weapons to destroy others while ensuring their own security. Yet it may be only a day or a night and such a community finds itself subjected to God's punishment. (26:139-140)

The story of Hud and his people has the same beginning as Noah's story: The Aad, too, denied God's Messengers. Their brother Hud said to them: Will you have no fear of God? I am a Messenger [sent by Him] to you, worthy of all trust. So, fear God and pay heed to me. No reward whatever do I ask of you for it: my reward is only from the Lord of all the worlds.

It is the same message given by every messenger of God: it is a call to believe in God alone and to fear Him and obey His messenger. This is coupled with a declaration disclaiming any interest in worldly luxuries or position the people may have to offer. This puts things in the right perspective. The messenger seeks nothing from them, but instead he looks to God for his reward.

Hud follows this declaration by examining their own particular conditions and behavior. He criticizes the fact that they build lofty buildings to demonstrate their ability, taking pride in their wealth. He denounces their arrogance which results from their material power and the resources that enable them to use different forces and means, in total disregard of God, oblivious to the fact of their accountability to Him.

It seems that they used to build on high places so as to make such structures appear from a distance as grand landmarks. They did so to emphasize their superiority and great ability. Hence the Quran describes it as a vain endeavor. Had it been intended as a landmark or a sign to show direction, it would not have been described as such. The Quranic statement, then, implies the need to direct one's resources and abilities to what is of benefit, not merely to show off and demonstrate abilities and wealth. It also appears that the people of Aad were well advanced in industry, using machinery to carve positions for their palaces that they built on mountains. This is indicated in what Hud said to them. It even occurred to them that such strong structures built with the use of heavy machinery could spare their lives, and protect them from severe atmospheric conditions as also from enemy attack.

They have further practices that are strongly criticized by Hud. They were mighty, hard, tyrannical and would deal with others using utmost cruelty, like many others who rely on material power.

Hud, therefore, reminds them that they must fear God and obey His messenger. This would be sure to redress their cruelty and put a stop to their arrogance. He further reminds them of God's grace, as it is He who has favored them with His blessings that they use arrogantly as also to oppress others. They should have remembered God's favors and given thanks for them. They should also bear in mind that the One who has granted them such favors can easily take them back, or punish them for putting His favors to wrong use.

Hud's reminder mentions first the One who granted them such blessings before enumerating them. He then gives further details." These were the best favors that they could have enjoyed during that period of time. They are indeed a great favor at any time. He then

warns them against punishment that may befall them on an awesome day. His warning expresses his fear for their end, because he is one of them, their brother, and he wants to spare them the hardship of that day which is certain to come.

But his reminders and warnings do not touch their hardened hearts. They stubbornly refuse to mend their ways. This is a derogatory way of speaking, one which expresses their carelessness for whatever he might say. They add a clear indication that they are hardened in their ways, relying totally on what they have inherited from previous generations. Their only argument in defense of all the practices Hud has criticized them for is that they are following earlier generations, towing their line. They then deny the possibility of being punished for following in their ancestors' footsteps.

[These verses do] not mention here any of the arguments that took place between them and Hud. It proceeds straight to the end. These two short sentences, expressed in the original Arabic text by only two words, *fakadhdhabuhu faahlaknahum*, spell out the end of the mighty people of Aad and their great symbols of power. Nothing is left of their luxuries, cattle, children, gardens and springs.

How many a community has followed the same practices as the people of Aad, moving further away from God with every new aspect of civilization they have achieved. They always think that man can be independent of God. They try to produce weapons to destroy others while ensuring their own security. Yet it may be only a day or a night and such a community finds itself subjected to God's punishment.

They did not soften to their brother's call when he said to them. (26:106) Will you not worry about the end to which your attitudes and actions lead you?

This directive and reminder to fear God is consistent in [these verses]. We saw it with Pharaoh and his people as God informed Moses of his assignment. Then every prophet that succeeded Noah said the same thing to his community. (26:107) He would not cheat, defraud or act dishonestly. He would not add to, or withhold anything from what he was required to deliver to his people. (26:108) In this case, Noah again reminds his people to fear God, giving it a more express definition this time. He appeals to their consciences to obey him as he calls on them to surrender themselves to God.

The Message of Hud

Chapter 11: The 52nd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And to Aad, their brother Hud.*

He said: O my folk! Worship God!
You have no god other than He.
You are nothing but ones who devise. (11:50)
O my folk! I ask not of you any compensation.
My compensation is but with Who originated me.
Will you not, then, be reasonable? (11:51)
And O my folk! Ask your Lord for forgiveness.
Again, repent to Him. He will send abundant rain to you from heaven
and increase you, adding strength to your strength.
So turn not away as ones who sin. (11:52)
*They said: O Hud! Have **You** brought about*
any clear portent for us?
We will not be ones who leave our gods for thy saying?
*And we are not ones who believe in **you**.* (11:53)
Truly, we say nothing but that some of our gods
*inflicted **you** with evil.*
He said: Truly, I call God to witness and bear you witness
that I am free from partners you ascribe (11:54)
other than Him. So try to outwit me altogether.
Again, give me no respite. (11:55)
Truly, I put my trust in God, my Lord and your Lord.
There is not a moving creature
but He is One Who Takes of its forelock.
Truly, my Lord is on a straight path. (11:56)
But if you turn away, that is your decision.
Then, surely, I expressed to you what I was sent with to you.
And my Lord will make successors a folk other than you
and you will not injure Him at all.
Truly, My Lord is Guardian over everything. (11:57)
And Our command drew near.
We delivered Hud and those who believed
with him by a mercy from Us.
And We delivered them from a harsh punishment. (11:58)
And that was Aad. They negated the signs of their Lord
and rebelled against His Messengers.
And they followed the command
of every haughty and stubborn one. (11:59)
And they were pursued in the present life by a curse.
And on the Day of Resurrection, no doubt, truly,
Aad were ungrateful to their Lord.
Away with Aad, a folk of Hud! (11:60)

Commentary°

Every messenger was sent to his own community. At the start of his message, the messenger would be a member of his community, addressing them as a brother, desiring for them all the goodness a brother desires for his siblings. He wanted them to have all the goodness he had found in God's guidance, and for which he found clear evidence granted by his Lord. This was the attitude of every single messenger at the beginning; but it was not the same with any of them at the end.

A group from among every community responded to the message. They began to worship God alone. Thus, they surrendered themselves totally to God, forming together a community of believers, or a Muslim community, in the broader sense of the term. Another group rejected the message, denying its truth and continuing to submit to deities other than God. They remained in ignorance. Thus, they became a community of ungrateful.

This means that by their different attitudes towards God's messenger and his message, the same people became two communities: one Muslim and the other idolater. They were no longer one community, despite being of the same race and origin. Ties of race, land and common interests could no longer unite them and govern their relations. With the divine message a new bond came into being, uniting or dividing the same people. This is the bond of faith, with the type of submission it requires and the code of living it lays down.

What the advocates of Islamic revival today must clearly understand is that God never set the believers apart from the unbelievers until the believers themselves split away from the rest of their people. In so doing they declared their rejection of idolatry, submitted to God alone, and refused to obey any tyrannical authority. They also refused to participate in the social life of the community ruled by an authority implementing laws different from those of God.

God did not act to destroy the wrongdoers until the believers had separated themselves from them. This means that the believers must declare to the rest of their people that they are a community apart, with a distinctive faith, way of life and line of action. This is essential before God acts to fulfill His promise of granting victory to the believers and inflicting His punishment on the unbelievers.

It is particularly important that advocates of Islamic revival should understand this constant rule so as to plan their method of operation. The first step is to call on people to submit themselves to God alone, and to no one else. The same people will eventually split

into two groups. The believers then separate themselves from the rest. When all this takes place, God's promise to grant victory to the believers becomes due for fulfillment, as consistently happened throughout history.

The period of advocacy and calling on people to believe may be prolonged before the separation occurs in practical terms. However, mental separation should start right at the beginning. Separating the two communities may be delayed, while one generation or more of believers provide sacrifices and endure hardship and torture. The believers must, nevertheless, remain convinced that God's promise is more true than the apparent reality. It will not fail to come at the appropriate time. God never fails to honor His promises.

Who Understands the Quran?

These observations about the historical accounts given in the chapter reveal to us the nature of the Islamic approach, as outlined in the Quran. It is a practical approach in the face of human realities. These histories were related to the Prophet when he was in Makkah. The small number of believers were confined to their city, and the message practically besieged within it. The road ahead must have seemed to those believers to be long, arduous and without an end in sight. These histories showed them the end and outlined the different stages ahead. The Quran thus took the believers by the hand, helpe(them on the road that had become a continuation of the march tha started at the beginning of human history advocating the true faith of self-surrender to God alone. Thus, they no longer felt that their road was deserted. They felt themselves to be a new group in a continuous procession walking along a well-charted road. They moved from the starting point to the finishing line according to a well-defined plan.

Thus did the Quran act with the Muslim community, moving it in safe and measured steps. Thus it can do today and in future with the advocates of Islamic revival, moving them along the same way. These advocates need the Quran as a guiding light, marking its movement and outlining its stages.

When the Quran plays this role, it is no longer treated as mere words recited for blessing. It comes alive as if it is being bestowed now from on high to guide the Muslim community which implements its directives and hopes for the fulfillment of God's promise which it clearly states.

This is what we mean when we say that this Quran reveals its secrets only to the Muslim group that moves according to its guid-

ance, to put its message into practice. It does not reveal these secrets to those who only read it for blessings, artistic or scientific study, or to appreciate its artistic beauty and fine style. None of these will truly appreciate much of the Quran, because the Quran was not bestowed from on high for such purposes. It was rather revealed to act as a practical guide providing directives for implementation.

Those who face up to ignorance with the message of Islam, and who endeavor to return erring humanity to the faith based on submission to God alone, and who strive against tyranny in order to liberate humanity from servitude to others, are the ones who truly understand the Quran. They are the ones who live in an environment similar to that which prevailed when the Quran was revealed. They make the same attempt made by those who were the first to be addressed by the Quran. As they make their endeavors, they appreciate the meaning of its verses, because they see how such meaning applies to events and practical situations. This by itself is compensation for all the pain they have to endure and the sacrifice they have to make.

What am I saying? Is it compensation? Certainly not. It is a great blessing from God.

Every messenger was sent to his own community. At the start of his message, the messenger would be a member of his community, addressing them as a brother, desiring for them all the goodness a brother desires for his siblings. He wanted them to have all the goodness he had found in God's guidance, and for which he found clear evidence granted by his Lord. This was the attitude of every single messenger at the beginning; but it was not the same with any of them at the end.

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The Punishement Following Denial

Chapter 54: The 37th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Aad denied. So how had been*
My punishment and My warning? (54:18)
Truly, We sent a raging wind against them
on a day of continuous misfortune, (54:19)
tearing out humanity as if they had been
uprooted palm trees, uprooted. (54:20)
So how had been My punishment and My warning? (54:21)
And, certainly, We made the Quran easy as a Remembrance.
Then, is there one who recalls? (54:22)

Commentary°

The people of Aad also rejected the truth. How grievous was My punishment and how true were My warnings? We sent against them a howling cold wind on a day of unceasing misfortune: it swept people away as though they were uprooted palm trunks. How grievous was My punishment and how true were My warnings? We have made the Quran easy to bear in mind: will anyone take heed? (Verses 18-22)

The scene is violent and fearful; the storm wind sent against the Aad was one of Gods forces. It is a natural phenomenon God has placed in the universe. It operates according to the universal system He has chosen. He sends it against whomever He wishes. It continues to operate within natural laws, where there is no conflict between its normal operation in the planned order of things and its fulfillment of God's orders whatever they happen to be. It is He who set this natural law and issued the command. (Verse 21) This statement is now repeated after the scene has been shown providing the answer. The episode concludes with the other comment repeated throughout the surah according to its own flow: We have made the Quran easy to bear in mind. (Verse 22)

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The People of Aad

Chapter 40: The 60th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And he who believed said: O my folk!*
Truly, I fear for you like a Day of the confederates, (40:30)
in like manner of a folk of Noah and Aad and Thamud
and those after them.
And God wants not injustice for His servants. (40:31)

The Creation of the Earth and the Heavens

Chapter 41: The 61st Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *But if they turned aside, then, say:*
I warned you of a thunderbolt
like the thunderbolt of Aad and Thamud. (41:13)
And when the Messengers drew near before them
and from behind them saying: Worship none but God,
they said: If our Lord willed,
He would have caused angels to descend.
Then, truly, in what you were sent,
we are ones who disbelieve. (41:14)
As for Aad, they grew arrogant on the earth without right
and they said: Who is more vigorous than us in strength?
Consider they not that God Who created them,
He was more vigorous than they in strength?
And they had been negating Our signs. (41:15)
So We sent on them a raging wind in days of misfortune
that We might cause them
to experience the punishment of degradation in this present life.
And the punishment in the world to come will be more degrading;
and they will not be helped. (41:16)
So We sent on them a raging wind in days of misfortune that We might cause them to experience the punishment of degradation in this present life. And the punishment in the world to come will be more degrading; and they will not be helped. (41:17)

We delivered those who believed
and had been God-conscious. (41:18)

COMMENTARY°

If they turn away, say: Warn you of a thunderbolt like the thunderbolt that struck the Aad and Thamud. There came to them, from all directions, Messengers saying: Worship none but God. (41:13-18)

What sort of effect did this warning have on the unbelievers in Makkah? Ibn Ishaq, an early biographer of the Prophet, gives us the following story:

Another report by Jabir suggests that when the Prophet recited these verses, Utbah listened. When the Prophet read verse 13, Utbah put his hand on the Messenger's mouth and appealed to him by the ties of kinship to his people to do nothing of the sort.

Then Utbah left him, went home and stayed in doors. His people talked to him later about this and he explained his position: When Muhammad spoke this warning, I appealed to him not to do so. You know that when Muhammad says something, he does not lie. I feared that such punishment be inflicted on you."

This is, then, one image of the effect of the warning as stated by God's Messenger to a person who did not believe in his message.

What does this warning signify: (41:13) Essentially, it begins a fresh round showing us images of the fates met by earlier communities who rejected Gods message. The reckless arrogance of the present unbelievers is thus made all the more apparent through this reminder of what happened to similarly reckless and arrogant peoples: (41:14) This is the single issue as presented by all God's Messengers; it states the central point in every divine religion.

They answered: If our Lord had wished, He would have sent down angels. We will never believe in your message. (Sign 41:14) Similarly, this represents the same point of doubt faced by every Messenger. Yet a Messenger addressing human beings could not be other than human. This so that he would know the people he addressed and they would know him. In essence, a Messenger should provide a practical example and share his peoples problems. Yet the (Ad and Thamud declared themselves unbelievers simply because the Messengers sent to them were human like themselves. They were not angels as they wanted them to be.

Up to this point, the chapter speaks of the fates of both peoples as if they are one: both were struck by thunderbolts. Now, the chapter gives us some specific details about both peoples: (41:15) The right

attitude is that all creatures should submit to God and that people should not behave arrogantly. Who, then, are the Aad in comparison to God's great creation? All arrogant behavior, by whatever creature, is against all right. Yet these people thought themselves powerful. They asked: Who is mightier than us? This is the false sense exhibited by all tyrants when they feel that they have silenced all opposition and that none can stand against their power. They forget the truth: (41:15)

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How the People of Aad Were Punished

Chapter 46: The 66th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And remember the brother of Aad*
when he warned his folk in the curving sandhills.
Warnings passed away before and after him saying:
Worship nothing but God.
Truly, I fear for you the punishment of a tremendous Day. (46:21)
They said: Hadst thou drawn near to us to
mislead us from our gods?
Then, bring us that which thou hast promised us
if thou hadst been among the ones who are sincere. (46:22)
He said: The knowledge is only with God
and I state to you what I was sent with,
but I see that you are a folk who are ignorant. (46:23)
Then, when they saw it as a dense cloud
proceeding towards their valleys,
they said: This is a dense cloud, that which gives rain to us.
Nay! It is what you seek to hasten, a wind

in which there is a painful punishment. (46:24)
It will destroy everything at the command of its Lord.
So it came to be in the morning nothing
was seen but their dwellings.
Thus, We give recompense to the folk, ones who sin. (46:25)
And, certainly, We established them firmly in what We established you firmly not and We made for them the ability to hear and sight and minds. Yet having the ability to hear availed them not, nor their sight, nor their minds at all since they had been negating the signs of God. And surrounded were they by what they had been ridiculing. (46:26)

COMMENTARY°

The brother of the Aad is the Prophet Hud (peace be upon him) who is mentioned here by his position as a brother to his people. This highlights the relation of mutual love and care that existed between him and his people, which should have made them more responsive to his call and motivated them to think well of him and what he taught. The same bond existed between Muhammad (peace be upon him) and his people who similarly opposed him.

The Aad used to build their homes on the high sand dunes in a valley in the south of the Arabian Peninsula, said to be near Hadramawt. God in His glory directs His messenger to remember Hud and how he warned his people at the Valley of the Sand Dunes. This to give him encouragement as he realizes that Hud was similarly rejected by his people. Such remembrance also serves to remind the Makkan unbelievers of the fate of those earlier communities that rejected God's messages.

Hud warned his people, but he was not the first messenger to warn his community. Other messengers did the same before him. (46:21) Worshipping God means faith at heart and a code of living. To discard all this inevitably leads to terrible suffering in this present life, or in the life to come, or in both. When reference is made to a day, as it is made here, it means the Day of Judgment when the suffering is far greater and more terrible.

What response did Hud's people give him for his caring instructions and warnings? (46:22) Their response betrays mistrust, lack of understanding, rejection of the warning, hastening the punishment he warned them against, arrogance and a persistent adherence to false beliefs.

For his part, Hud receives all this with patience, showing the manners that behove a prophet. He makes no personal claims as he

outlines his attitude and makes his limits clear to them. (46:23) I am giving you this warning as I was commanded to do, but I do not know when such punishment fails, or what form it will take. All this is known to God alone. I am only delivering a message entrusted to me, making no further claim. (46:23) What could be more foolish and insolent than to give such a hostile reception to a brother who is only offering sincere and honest advice?

The signs give no further details of the long argument that took place between Hud and his people, moving straight to report on the fate they suffered. This is intended here as a reply to their challenge and hastening of punishment: Reports suggest that the Aad suffered a period of intense heat, coupled with absence of rain. They endured this unbearable climate for some time. Then God sent them clouds, and they were delighted. They went into the surrounding valleys hoping that rain would quickly ensue. Yet the truth of what the clouds brought signified their ultimate demise: This is a universal fact that the Quran is wont to impress on people. This universe is alive, and every force in it is aware of what God wants of it, proceeding to fulfill it. The human being is one of these forces. When he is a true believer, his heart becomes open to greater knowledge and he becomes able to understand more of the universal forces around him and respond to them. This opens the way to a mutual response that differs from what people generally know of life and understanding. Everything around us has life, but we do not appreciate this because shapes and forms limit our understanding. The universe around us is full of secrets that are appreciated by faculties of understanding, even though they cannot be seen by our eyes.

The storm wind fulfilled the task assigned to it, destroying everything. (Verse 25) No trace of the Aad was left behind, not even their animals or belongings. Everything disappeared. All that was left were desolate dwellings, empty, lacking all signs of life. (46:25) This rule applies to all guilty people.

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be seen by our eyes.

The Destruction of the People of Aad

Chapter 51: The 67th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And in Aad, when We sent against them*
the withering wind. (51:41)
It forsakes not anything it approached,
but made it like it was decayed. (51:42)

Wrong About the Attitude of the Ancestors

Chapter 14: The 72nd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Approach not to you the tidings*
of those before you:
The folk of Noah and Aad and Thamud
and of those after them.
None knows them but God.
Their Messengers drew near them with the clear portents,
but they shoved their hands into their mouths in denial.
Then, they said: Truly, we disbelieved in what you were sent
and we are in uncertainty about that to which you call us.
We are in grave doubt. (14:9)

The People of Aad and the Day of Disaster

Chapter 69: The 78th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And what would cause thee to recognize*
what The Reality is? (69:3)
Thamud and Aad denied the Day of Disaster. (69:4)
Then, as for Thamud, they were caused to perish
by a storm of thunder and lightning. (69:5)
As for Aad, they were caused to perish
by a fierce and roaring, raging wind. (69:6)
It compelled against them for seven
uninterrupted nights and eight days
so will you see the folk in it laid prostrate
as if they had been uprooted fallen down date palm trees? (69:7)
Then, will you see of them any ones who endure? (69:8)

Satan Made Their Actions Pleasing to Them

Chapter 29: The 85th Chapter Revealed

Madinah: *And Ad and Thamud, surely, it became clear to you*

from their dwellings.
Satan made their actions appear pleasing to them
and barred them from the way
and they had been ones who see clearly. (29:38)

So We took each of them in his impiety.
And of them was he on whom We sent a sand storm
and of them was he whom the Cry took
and of them was he whom We caused the earth to swallow
and of them were some whom We drowned.
And God had not been doing wrong to them,
but they had been doing wrong themselves. (29:40)

Approaches them not the tidings of those before them—the folk of Noah and of Ad and of Thamud, and of a folk of Abraham, and of the Companions of Midian, and that which are cities overthrown? Their Messengers approached them with the clear portents. So it had not been God who did wrong to them, rather, they had been doing wrong to themselves. (9:70)

SALIH AND THE PEOPLE OF THAMUD

The story of Salih and the people of Thamud is similar to that of the story of Hud and the people of Aad.

CHAPTER 89: THE 10TH CHAPTER REVEALED

Makkah: *And with Thamud, those who hollowed out the rocks in the valley?* (89:9)
And with Pharaoh, the possessor of the stakes, (89:10)
those who were defiant in the land (89:11)
and made much corruption in it? (89:12)
*So **your** Lord unloosed on them a scourge of punishment.* (89:13)
*Truly, **your** Lord is, surely, on the watch.* (89:14)

COMMENTARY°

The Thamud (89:9) used to live at Al-Hijr, a rocky tract in northern Arabia, on the road from Madinah to Syria. They excelled in using rocks to build their palaces and homes. They also dug shelters and caves into the mountains.

These people were all transgressors throughout their lands, bringing about much corruption there. (89:11-89:12) Corruption is an inevitable result of tyranny, and it affects the tyrant and his subjects alike. Indeed, tyranny ruins all human relations. It forces human life out of its healthy, constructive and straight path and diverts it into a line which does not lead to the fulfillment of the human beings's role as God's vicegerent on earth. Tyranny makes the tyrant captive of his own desires because he is uncommitted to any principle or standard and unrestrained within any reasonable limit. Thus the tyrant is always the first to be corrupted by his own tyranny. He assumes for himself a role other than that of a servant of God, entrusted with a specific mission.

Tyranny also corrupts the masses, as it humiliates them and compels them to suppress their discontent and hatred. It kills all human dignity and wastes all creative talents, which cannot flourish except in an atmosphere of freedom. A humiliated soul inevitably rots away and becomes a breeding ground for sickly desires. Therefore, digression from the right path becomes the order of the day as clear vision becomes an impossibility. In such conditions no aspiration to a higher human standard can be entertained. The net result of all this is the spread of corruption.

Tyranny also destroys all healthy standards and concepts because they constitute a threat to its existence. Therefore, values are falsified and standards are distorted so that the repulsive idea of despotism becomes acceptable as natural. This, in itself, is great corrup-

tion.

When these aforementioned peoples caused such corruption, the remedy was, inevitably, a complete purge: (89:13-89:14) God is certainly aware of their deeds and He records them all. So, when corruption increased, He severely punished the corrupt. The text connotes that the punishment was very painful as it uses the term 'scourge', or 'whip' as the Arabic term literally means, and that it was in large supply as indicated by use of the phrase 'let loose'. Thus these tyrants were made to suffer a plentiful and painful retribution.

As the believer faces tyranny in any age or place, he feels great reassurance emanating from far beyond the fates of all those communities. He also feels a particular comfort as he reads the verse: (89:14) Nothing passes unnoticed and nothing is forgotten. So let the believers be always reassured that God will deal, in time, with all corruption and tyranny.

Thus the chapter provides some examples of what God may do about the cause of faith. All these stories are related for a definite purpose, namely, the education of the believers and their preparation to face whichever course God chooses for them. They will, then, be ready for all eventualities and equipped with God's reassurance as they submit themselves to Him and let His will be done.

He sees, records, holds to account and rewards according to a strict and accurate measure which neither errs nor exceeds the limits of justice. (89:14) It is never deceived by appearances because it judges the essence of things. Human measures and standards are liable to all sorts of errors. The human being sees nothing beyond appearances unless he adopts the divine measure.

THE INGRATITUDE OF PREVIOUS PEOPLE

CHAPTER 53: THE 23RD CHAPTER REVEALED

Makkah: *and that He caused to perish*
the previous Aad (53:50)
and Thamud. He caused none to remain (53:51)

THE ARMIES OF THE THAMUD

CHAPTER 85: THE 27TH CHAPTER REVEALED

Makkah: *Approached you*
the discourse of the armies (85:17)
of Pharaoh and of Thamud? (85:18)

COMMENTARY°

Examples of this are given: *Approached you the discourse of the armies of Pharaoh and of Thamud?* (85:17-85:18) This is a reference to two long stories well known to the addressees. The two nations concerned are described here by the term "the hosts" in reference to their might and equipment. Have you heard their stories and how God did with them as He pleased? Theirs were two stories, different in nature and consequence. Pharaoh and his army were eliminated when the Children of Israel were saved by God. He gave them power to rule for a certain period in order to accomplish a certain scheme. As for the Thamud, God exterminated them and saved His messenger, Salih, along with his few followers. The believers in this instance did not establish a state of their own; they were merely saved from corrupt enemies.

Both stories are manifestations of the divine will and its performance. They provide two examples of what may befall advocates of the Quranic faith. They are mentioned along with a third possibility which distinguishes the pit event. The Quran explains all three eventualities to the believers in Makkah and to all generations of believers.

THE THAMUD DENIED SALEH

CHAPTER 91: THE 26TH CHAPTER REVEALED

Makkah: *Thamud denied because*
of their overboldness. (91:11)
When the disappointed among them were aroused, (91:12)
and the Messenger of God said to them:
Allow watering to the she-camel of God. (91:13)
Then, they denied him; then, they crippled her.
So their Lord doomed them for their impiety. (91:14)
Then, He leveled them.
And He fears not its Ultimate End. (91:15)

THE MESSAGE OF SALEH

CHAPTER 7: THE 39TH CHAPTER REVEALED

Makkah: *And to Thamud God sent their brother Salih.*
He said: O my folk!
Worship God! You have no god but He.
Surely, drew near you clear
portents from your Lord. This is the she-camel of God
as a sign so allow her to eat on the earth of God
and afflict her not with evil
so a painful punishment not take you. (7:73)

And remember when He made you viceregents after Aad
and placed you on the earth.
You take to yourselves palaces on the plains
and carve out the mountains as houses.
So remember the benefits of God.
And do no mischief as ones who make corruption
in and on the earth. (7:74)
Said the Council of those who grew arrogant among his folk
to those who were taken advantage of due to their weakness,
to those who believed among them:
Know you that Salih is one who is sent from his Lord?
They said: Truly, in what he was sent,
we are ones who believe. (7:75)
Those who grew arrogant said: Truly, we are in what you
believed, ones who disbelieve. (7:76)
Then, they crippled the she-camel
and defied the command of their Lord
and they said: O Salih! Approach us
with what you have promised us
if you had been among the ones who are sent. (7:77)
So the quaking of the earth took them.
And it came to be in the morning
they were in their abodes ones who are fallen prostrate. (7:78)
Then, he turned away from them and said:
O my folk! Certainly, I expressed to you the message
of my Lord and advised you,
except you love not the ones who give advice. (7:79)

The Defeat of the Confederates

Chapter 387: The 38th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *and Thamud and a folk of Lot*
and the Companions of the Thicket.
Those were the confederates. (38:13)

The Punishment Given to the Ungrateful in the Past

Chapter 54: The 37th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Thamud denied the warning* (54:23)
for they said: Follow we a lone mortal from among us?
Truly, we would be going astray and insane. (54:24)
Is it that the Remembrance was cast down

to Salih from among us?
Nay! He is a rash liar! (54:25)
They will know tomorrow who the rash liar is! (54:26)
Truly, We are ones who sent the she-camel
as a test for them.
So you be on the watch for them
and maintain patience. (54:27)
And tell them that the division of the water
is between them.
Every drink was that which is divided in turn. (54:28)
But they cried out to their companion,
and he took her in hand and crippled her. (54:29)
So how had been My punishment and My warning? (54:30)
Truly, We sent against them one Cry
and they had been like straw
for the one who is a builder of animal enclosures. (54:31)

Parables Given About the Thamud

Chapter 25: The 42nd Chapter Revealed

and Ad and Thamud and the Companions of Rass
and many generations in between that. (25:37)
And We propounded parables for each of them. (25:38)
And We shattered each a shatterig. (25:39)

The Message of Salih

Chapter 11: The 52nd Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And We sent to Thamud their brother Salih.*
He said: O my folk! Worship God.
You have no god other than He. He caused you to grow
from the earth and settled you on it.
So ask for His forgiveness.
Again, repent to Him.
Truly, my Lord is Near, One Who Answers. (11:61)
They said: O Salih! Surely, you had been
one who is a source of hope to us before this.
Have you prohibited us that we worship
what our fathers worship?
And, truly, we are in uncertainty
about what you have called us to, in grave doubt. (11:62)
He said: O my folk! Considered you that I had been

with a clear portent from my Lord
and that He gave me a mercy from Himself
so who, then, would help me against God
if I rebelled against Him?
Then, you would increase me not but in decline. (11:63)
And: O my folk! This is the she-camel of God, a sign for you.
So let her eat on God's earth
and afflict her not with evil
so that a near punishment take you. (11:64)
But they crippled her.
So he said: Take joy in your abode for three days.
That is a promise, one that will not be belied. (11:65)
Then, Our command drew near. We delivered Salih and those
who believed with him by a mercy from Us
and from the degradation of that Day.
Truly, your Lord, He is Strong, Almighty. (11:66)
The Cry took those who did wrong. It came to be in the morning in
their abodes, ones who are fallen prostrate, (11:67)
... as if they dwelt not in them. No doubt, truly, Thamud were
ungrateful to their Lord. Away with Thamud. (11:68)

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And O my folk! Let not your breach with me drive you
into being lighted on by the like of what lit on a folk of Noah
or a folk of Hud or a folk of Salih
And a folk of Lot are not far from you. (11:89)

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... as if they had not been dwelling in them.
Away with Midian just as Thamud was done away. (11:95)

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The She-Camel Wronged

Chapter 17: The 50th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And nothing prevented Us from sending the signs,*
but that the ancient ones denied them.
And We gave to Thamud the she-camel
—the one who perceives—but they did wrong to her.
And We send not the signs, but as a deterrence. (17:59)

The People of Thamud Deny Salih

Makkah: *And Thamud denied the ones who are sent* (26:141)
when their brother Salih said to them:
Will you not be God-conscious? (26:142)

Truly, I am a trustworthy Messenger to you, (26:143)
so be God-conscious and obey me. (26:144)
And I ask you not for any compensation for it.
My compensation is only from the Lord of the worlds. (26:145)
Will you be left ones who are safe in what you have here (26:146)
in gardens and springs (26:147)
and crops of slender spathes of date palm trees? (26:148)
Will you carve houses out of the mountains
as ones who are skillful? (26:149)
So be God-conscious and obey me. (26:150)
Obey not the command of the ones who are excessive, (26:151)
who make corruption in and on the earth
and make not things right. (26:152)
They said: Truly, ***you*** *are only of the ones*
against whom a spell is cast. (26:153)
You *are not but a mortal like us.*
So bring us a sign if ***you*** *had been of the*
ones who are sincere. (26:154)
He said: This is a she camel. She has a right to drink
and you have a right to drink on a known day. (26:155)
And afflict her not with evil so that
you should take the punishment of a tremendous Day. (26:156)
But they crippled her and, then,
it came to be in the morning that they are
ones who are remorseful. (26:157)
So the punishment took them. Truly, in this is a sign
yet most of them had not been ones who believe. (26:158)
And, truly, ***your*** *Lord! He is, certainly,*
The Almighty, The Compassionate. (26:159)

Chapter 27: The 48th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And, certainly, We sent to Thamud*
their brother, Salih,
that they worship God!
Then, when they became two groups of people
striving against one another, (27:45)
Why ask you not for forgiveness of God
so that perhaps you will find mercy? (27:46)
They said: We auger ill of you and whoever is with ***you****.*
He said: That which is your omen is with God.
Nay! You are a folk who are being tried. (27:47)
And there had been nine groups of persons in the city

who make corruption in the earth
and make not things right. (27:48)
They said: Swear to one another by God:
We will, certainly, attack him by night and his people.
Again, we will, certainly, say to his protector:
We bore not witness to the destruction of his people
and, truly, we are ones who are sincere. (27:49)
So they planned a plan and We planned a plan
while they were not aware. (27:50)
So look on how had been the Ultimate End of their planning!
Truly, We destroyed them and their folk one and all. (27:51)
And that are their houses, ones that have fallen down
for what they did wrong.
Truly, in this is a sign for a folk who know. (27:52)
And We rescued those who believed
and had been God-conscious. (27:53)

God Wants Not Injustice for His Servants

Chapter 40: The 60th Chapter Revealed

And he who had beleive said: O my folk!
Truly, I fear for you like a day of the confederates, (40:30)
like the custom of a folk of Noah
and Aad and Thamud and those after them.
And God wants not injustice for His servants. (40:31)

The Thamud Warned of a Thunderbolt

Chapter 41: The 61st Chapter Revealed

But if they turned aside, then, say: I warned you of a thunderbolt
like the thunderbolt of Aad and Thamud. (41:13)

The Thamud Were Guided

Chapter 41: The 61st Chapter Revealed

And as for Thamud, We guided them,
but they embraced blindness of heart instead of guidance.
Then, a thunderbolt took them with a humiliating punishment
because of what they had been earning. (41:17)
We delivered those who believed
and had been God-conscious. (41:18)

Tidings of The Thamud

Chapter 51: The 67th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *And in Thamud, when it was said to them:*
Take joy for a while. (51:43)
Yet they defied the command of their Lord so the thunderbolt took
them while they look on. (51:44)
They were neither able to stand up
nor had they been ones who are aided. (51:45)

Chapter 14: The 72nd Chapter Revealed

Approach not to you the tidings of those before you:
The folk of Noah and Ad and Thamud
and of those after them.
None knows them but God.
Their Messengers drew near them with the clear portents,
but they shoved their hands into their mouths in denial.
Then, they said: Truly, we disbelieved in what you were sent
and we are in uncertainty about that to which you call us.
We are in grave doubt. (14:9)

The Inevitable

Chapter 69: The 78th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Thamud and Aad denied the Day of Disaster.* (69:4)
Then, as for Thamud, they were caused to perish
by a storm of thunder and lightning. (69:5)

The Thamud Taken for Their Impiety

Chapter 29: The 85th Chapter Revealed

So We took each of them in his impiety.
And of them was he on whom We sent a sand storm
and of them was he whom the Cry took
and of them was he whom We caused the earth to swallow
and of them were some whom We drowned.
And God had not been doing wrong to them,
but they had been doing wrong themselves. (29:40)

The Thamud City Overthrown

Chapter 9: The 113th Chapter Revealed

Approaches them not the tidings of those before them—
the folk of Noah and of Ad and of Thamud,
and of a folk of Abraham, and of the Companions of Midian,
and that which are cities overthrown?

Their Messengers approached them with the clear portents.
So it had not been God who did wrong to them,
rather, they had been doing wrong to themselves. (9:70)

The Companions of the Rocky Tract (al-Hijr)

Chapter 15: The 54th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Certainly, the Companions of the Rocky Tract*
denied the ones who are sent. (15:80)
And We gave them Our signs. Then, they had been ones who turn
aside from them. (15:81)
And they had been carving out
safe houses from mountains, (15:82)
but the Cry took them in that which is morning. (15:83)

Al-Hijr was the capital city of the people of Thamud. Its ruins are found near the modern city of Al-Ula which is to the north west of Madinah and lies on the route from Madinah to Tabuk. Though the caravans had to pass through the valley of al-Hijr, the Prophet had forbidden Muslims to stay in the valley on their journey.

When Ibn Batutah reached there in the eighth century of Hijrah on his way to Makkah, he wrote: "I have seen the buildings of Thamud hewed into red mountains; the paintings look so bright as if they have been put on only recently.... and rotten bones of human beings are found in them even today."

That is, their strong and secure buildings, which they had hewed into the mountains, could not protect them from the blast.

The People of the Ditch (al-Ukhdud)

Chapter 85: The 29th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: ... *the Companions of the Ditch were slain,* (85:4)
possessors of the fuel of the fire (85:5)
above which they were ones who sit, (85:6)
as they were, in what they accomplish against the ones who believe,
ones who bore witness. (85:7)

The People of Tubba

We have no information about the people of Tubba, a tittle used by the Yemeni kings of the Himyar dynasty.

Chapter 44: The 64th Chapter Revealed

Makkah: *Are they better or a folk of Tubba*
and those who were before them?
We caused them to perish.
They, truly, had been ones who sin.(44:37)